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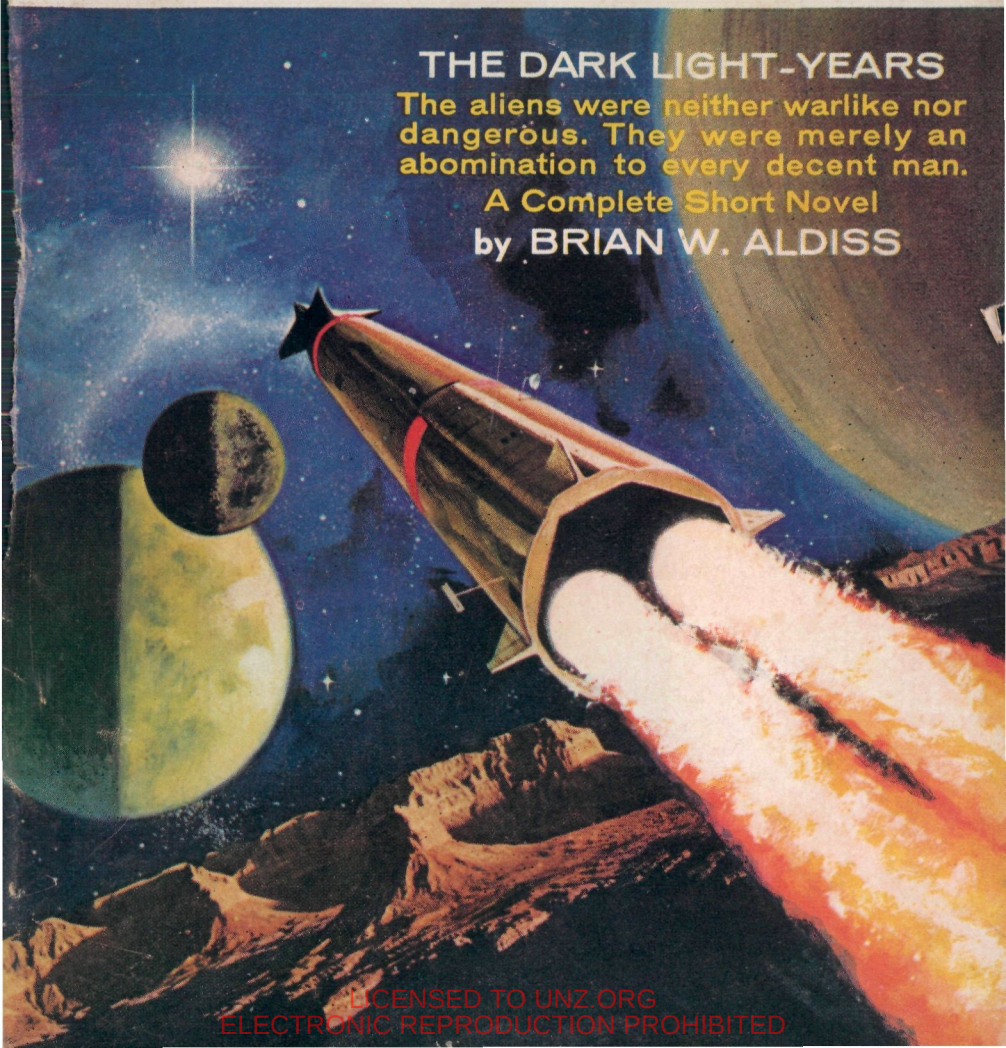

THE DARK LIGHT-YEARS

The aliens were neither warlike nor dangerous. They were merely an abomination to every decent man.

A Complete Short Novel

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

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APRIL 1964

Vol. 2 No. 1

ALL NEW STORIES

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STARS AND CITIES

If you substract biology from literary and dramatic art, there isn't a great deal left that is worth the having. Consider how much our simplest biological functions and events have contributed to literature, for example. Sex has given us the basis for every romance and love-tragedy, from *Romeo and Juliet* to the *Liebestod.* The intake of nourishment has given us the belly-proud Falstaff and Red Skelton's drunk act, for comedy, and for pathos such compassionate passages as the closing scenes of *The Grapes of Wrath;* while that other elementary biological phenomenon, death, lies at the heart of every story of adventure, suspense or war.

We share all of these events and functions with the lower animals, of course. Yet out of them we have managed to build a mighty literature and a complex and rewarding system of social values. Friendship can be quantified by food — we break bread with a stranger as a pledge that we mean no agrression, we "won't sit down and eat with" an inferior, we toast the health of a comrade. Our religion regulates, and is regulated by, these triple functions of reproducing, eating and dying, and around each of them we have erected an elaborate series of rituals . . . so complicated and so potent that we are likely to judge a new acquaintance by his table manners or promiscuity, which is to say by the way in which he conforms to our

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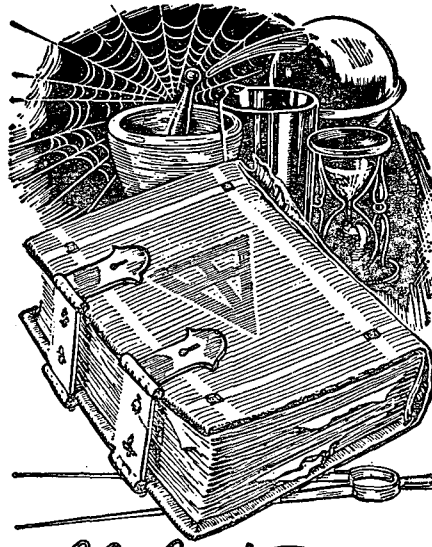
Secrets entrusted to a few



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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concepts of these matters.

It is worth noting that the human race his conspicuously failed to ritualize one other basic human function. And yet, when looked at objectively — when seen with the help of what Harlow Shapley calls "The View from a Distant Star" is there any reason why this function should not serve a comparable role?

Brian W. Aldiss says there is not; and he goes on to explain what he means in his brilliantly conceived and executed story in this issue, The *Dark Light-Years*. We have an idea that his answer will produce a certain number of objections from readers.

If you are one of the readers who may object, we tender you pro-forma apologies. It is not our purpose to shock, but we know some readers will be shocked by it. And yet we publish it, because —

— because it seems to us worthwhile to accept a little offense and endure a little shock for the purpose of getting a better look at ourselves, from the point of view of a race rather less like disguished humans than is common in science-fiction stories. It is a rewarding look, and we think it important that we be given this sort of catharsis from time to time, even at the price of a little of the instinctive revulsion nearly everyone will feel.

After all . . . what else is science fiction for?

We think, too, that you'll be especially interested in Tom Purdom's *The Urban Hell*, beginning on page 94. The role of the city in human life, and specifically in science-fiction stories, has been of major importance. Yet too often it is taken for granted — looked on as a gathering of human beings differing in quantity but not in kind from any early clutch of savage squatting around a fire.

It is diversity, not numbers, which makes a city. This diversity, which only a city can provide, is what makes the city one of the earliest and perhaps the most important of man's early inventions, contemporary with agriculture and fire, and comparably important in shaping our history and our lives. At Sophocles said in *Antigone* more than two thousand years ago, "A city that is of one man is no city." As Tom Purdom says here now, "Diversity creates diversity"—a process which, in biology, is the father and determiner of progressive evolution.

Dirty, cluttered, noisy, cramped, expensive — we'll have cities with us for a long time yet!

Going anywhere this Labor Day? As there is every Labor Day, there'll be a World Science Fiction Convention. This year's will be in Oakland, California; the Guests of Honor — a double bill this time — are Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett, as fine a husband-and-wife team of science-fiction writers as the field has yet produced; and if you're going to be in the California part of the world around that time of year, drop in. We'll hope to see you there!

— THE EDITOR

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THE DARK LIGHT-YEARS

BY BRIAN W. ALDISS

ILLUSTRATED BY GUINTA

The aliens were neither warlike nor dangerous. They were merely an abomination to all decent men!

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers . . .
T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets.

On the ground, new blades of grass sprang up in chlorophyll coats. On the trees, tongues of green protruded from boughs and branches, wrapping them about — soon the place would look like an imbecile Earth child's attempt to draw Christmas trees — as spring again set spur to the growing things in the southern hemisphere of Dapdrof.

Not that nature was more amiable on Dapdrof than elsewhere. Even as she sent the warmer winds over the southern hemisphere, she was sousing most of the northern in an ice-bearing monsoon.

Propped on G-crutches, old Ayl-

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mer Ainson stood at his door, scratching his scalp very leisurely and staring at the budding trees. Even the slenderest outmost twig shook very little.

This leaden effect was caused by gravity. Twigs, like everything else on Dapdrof, weighed three times as much as they did on Earth. Ainson was long accustomed to the phenomenon. His body had grown round-shouldered and hollow-chested in accustoming him to the phenomenon. His brain had grown a little round-shouldered as well.

Fortunately he was not afflicted with the craving to recapture the past that strikes down so many humans even before they reach middle age. The sight of infant green leaves woke in him only the vaguest nostalgia, roused in him only the faintest recollection that his childhood had been passed among foliage more responsive to April's zephyrs — zephyrs, moreover, a hundred light-years away. He was free to stand in the doorway and enjoy man's richest luxury, a blank mind.

Idly, he watched Quequo, the female utod, as she trod between her salad beds and under the ammp trees to launch her body into the bolstering mud. The ammp trees were evergreen, unlike the rest of the trees in Ainson's enclosure. Resting in the foliage on the crest of them were big four-winged white birds, which decided to take off as Ainson looked at them, fluttering up like immense butterflies and splashing their shadows across the house as they passed.

But the house was already splashed with their shadows. Obeying the urge to create a work of art that visited them perhaps only once in a century, Ainson's friends had broken the white of his walls with a scatter-brained scattering of silhouetted wings and bodies, urging upwards. The lively movement of this pattern seemed to make the low-eaved house rise against gravity. But that was appearance only, for this spring found the neoplastic rooftree sagging and the supporting walls considerably bucked at the knees.

This was the fortieth spring Ainson had seen flow across his patch of Dapdrof. Even the ripe stench from the middenstead now savored only of home. As he breathed it in, his grorg or parasite-eater scratched his head for him; reaching up, Ainson returned the compliment and tickled the lizard-like creature's cranium. He guessed what the grorg really wanted, but at that hour, with only one of the suns up, it was too chilly to join Snok Snok Karn and Quequo Kifful with their grorgs for a wallow in the mire.

"I'm cold standing out here. I am going inside to lie down," he called to Snok Snok in the utodian tongue.

The young utod looked up and extended two of his limbs in a sign of understanding. That was gratifying. Even after forty years' study, Ainson found the utodian language full of conundrums. He had not been sure that he had not said, "The stream is cold and I am going in-

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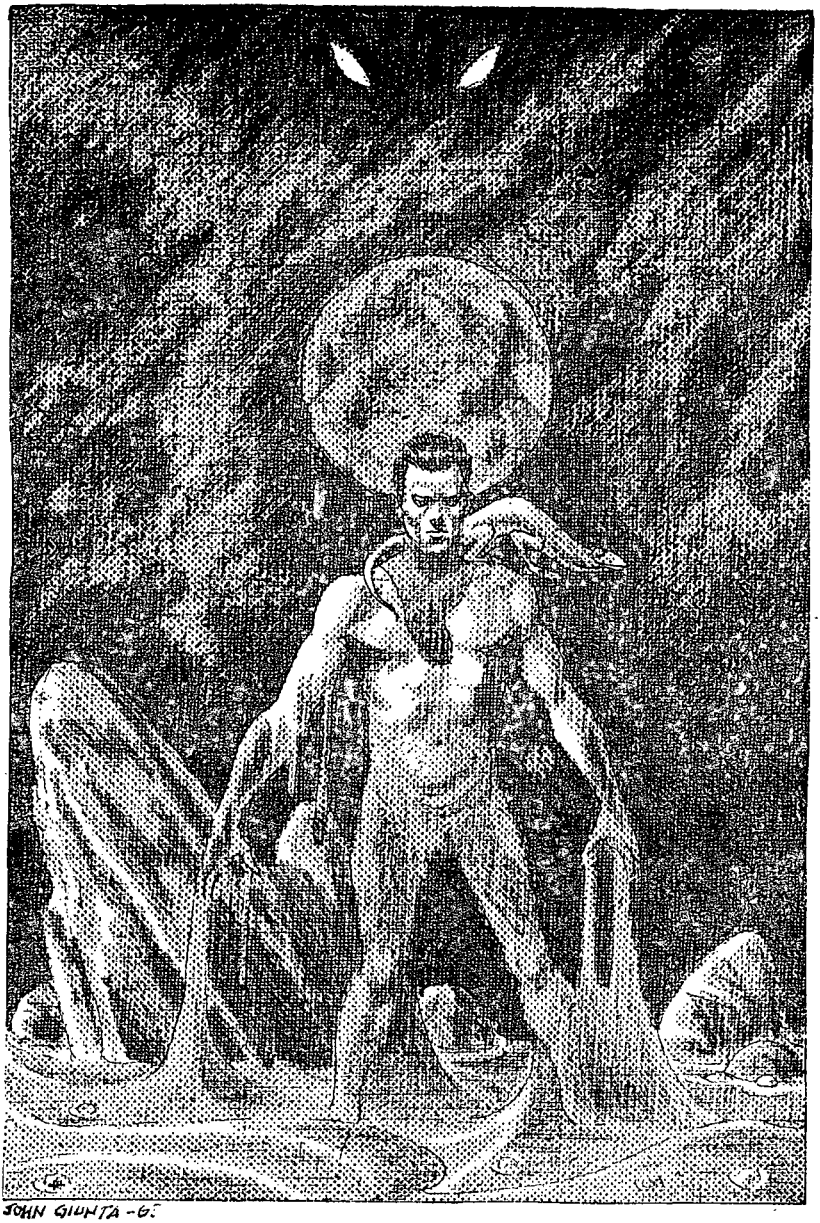

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side to cook it." Catching the right whistling inflected scream was not easy: he had only one sound orifice to Snok Snok's eight. He swung his crutches and went in.

"His speech is growing less distinct than it was," Quequo remarked. "We had difficulty enough teaching him to communicate. He is not an efficient mechanism, this manlegs. You may have noticed that he is moving more slowly than he did."

"I had noticed it, mother. He complains about it himself. Increasingly he mentions this phenomenon he calls pain."

"It is difficult to exchange ideas with Earthlegs because their vocabularies are so limited and their voice range minimal. But I gather from what he was trying to tell me the other night that if he were a utod he would now be almost a thousand years old."

"Then we must expect he will soon evolve into the carrion stage."

"That, I take it, is what the fungus on his skull signified by changing to white."

This conversation was carried out in the utodian language, while Snok Snok lay back against the huge symmetrical bulk of his mother and soaked in the glorious ooze. Their grorgs climbed about them, licking and pouncing. The stench, encouraged by the sun's mild shine, was gorgeous.

Snok Snok Karn was already a large utod, a strapping offspring of the dominant species of the lumbering world of Dapdrof. He was in fact adult now, although still neuter: and in his mind's lazy eye he saw himself as a male for the next few decades anyhow. He could change sex when Dapdrof changed suns.

For that event, the periodical entropic solar orbital disestablishment, Snok Snok was well prepared. Most of his lengthy childhood had been taken up with disciplines preparing him for it. Quequo had been very good on disciplines and on mind-suckle. Secluded from the world, as the two of them were here with Manlegs Ainson, she had given them all of her massive and maternal concentration.

Languidly, he deretracted a limb, scooped up a mass of slime and mud and walloped it over his chest. Then, recollecting his manners, he hastily sloshed some of the mixture over his mother's back.

"Mother, do you think Manlegs is preparing for esod?" Snok Snok asked, retracting the limb into the smooth wall of his flank. Manlegs was what they called Aylmer; esod was a convenient way of squeaking about entropic solar orbital disestablishmentism.

"It's hard to tell, the language barrier being what it is," Quequo said, blinking through mud. "We have tried to talk about it, but without much success. I must try again; we must both try. It would be a serious matter for him if he were not prepared — he could be suddenly converted into the carrion stage. But they must have the same sort of thing happening on the Manlegs planet."

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"It won't be long now, mother, will it?"

She did not bother to answer, for the grorgs were trotting actively up and down her spine. Snok Snok lay and thought about that time, not far off now, when Dapdrof would leave its present sun, Saffron Smiler, for Yellow Scowler. That would be a hard period, and he would need to be male and fierce and tough. Then eventually would come Welcome White, the happy star, the sun beneath which he had been born (and which accounted for his lazy and sunny good nature); under Welcome White, he could afford to take on the cares and joys of motherhood, and rear and train a son just like himself.

Ah, but life was wonderful when you thought deeply about it. The facts of esod might seem prosaic to some, but to Snok Snok, though he was only a simple country boy (simply reared too, without any notions about joining the priesthood and sailing out into the star-realms), there was a glory about nature. Even the sun's warmth, that filled his eight hundred and fifty pound bulk, held a poetry incapable of paraphrase. He heaved himself to one side and excreted into the midden, as a small tribute to his mother. Do to others as you would be dung by.

"Mother, was it because the priesthood had dared to leave the worlds of the Triple Suns that they met the Manlegs Earthmen?"

"You're in a talkative mood this morning. Why don't you go in and talk to Manlegs? You know how his version of what happens in star-realms amuses you."

"But Mother, which version is true, his or ours?"

She hesitated before giving him her answer. It was a wretchedly difficult answer, yet only through it lay an understanding of the world of affairs. She said: "Frequently there are several versions of truth."

He brushed the remark aside.

"But it was the priesthood that went beyond the Triple Suns who first met the Manlegs, wasn't it?"

"Why don't you lie still and ripen up?"

"Didn't you tell me they met on a world called Grudgrodd, only a few years after I was born?"

"Ainson told you that in the first place."

"It was you who told me that trouble would come from the meeting."

II

The first encounter between utod and man occurred ten years after the birth of Snok Snok. As Snok Snok said, this encounter was staged on the planet his race called Grudgrodd.

Had it happened on a different planet, had different protagonists been involved, the outcome of the whole matter might have been other than it was. Had someone . . . but there is little point in embarking on conditionals. There are no "ifs" in history, only in the minds of observers reviewing it; and for all the progress we make, nobody has proved that chance is other than a

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statistical delusion invented by man. We can only say that events between man and utod fell out in such and such a way.

This narrative will chronicle these events with as little comment as possible, leaving the reader on his honor to remember that what Quequo said applies as much to man as to aliens: truths arrive in as many forms as lies.

Grudgrodd looked tolerable enough to the first utods who inspected it.

A utodian star-realm-ark had landed in a wide valley, inhospitable, rocky, cold, and covered with knee-high thistles for the greater part of its length, but nevertheless closely resembling some of the benighted spots one happened on in the northern hemisphere of Dapdrof. A pair of grorgs were sent out through the hatch, to return in half an hour intact and breathing heavily. Odds were that the place was habitable.

Ceremonial filth was shovelled out onto the ground and the Sacred Cosmopolitan was induced to excrete out of the hatch.

"I think it's a mistake," he said. The utodian for 'a mistake' was Grudgrodd (as far as an atonal grunt can be rendered at all into terrestrial script), and from then on the planet was known as Grudgrodd.

Still inclined to protest, the Cosmopolitan stepped out, followed by his three Politans, and the planet was claimed as an appendage of the Triple Suns.

Four priestlings scurried busily about, clearing a circle in the thistles on the edge of the river. With all their six limbs deretracted, they worked swiftly, two of them scooping soil out of the circle, and then allowing the water to trickle in from one side, while the other two trod the resulting mud into a rich rebarbative treacle.

Watching the work abstractedly with his rear eyes, the Cosmopolitan stood on the edge of the growing crater and argued as strongly as ever a utod could on the rights and wrongs of landing on a planet not of the Triple Suns. As strongly as they could, the three Politans argued back.

"The Sacred Feeling is quite clear," said the Cosmopolitan. "As children of the Triple Suns, our defecations must touch no planets unlit by the Triple Suns." He extended a limb upwards, where a large mauve globe as big as an ammp fruit peered coldly at them over a bank of cloud. "Is that apology for a sun Saffron Smiler? Do you take it for Welcome White? Can you even mistake it for Yellow Scowler? No, no, my friends, that mauve misery is an alien, and we waste our substance on it."

The first Politan said, "Every word you say is incontrovertible. But we are not here entirely by option. We ran into a star-realm turbulence that carried us several thousand orbits off course. This planet just happened to be our nearest haven."

"As usual you speak only the truth," the Cosmopolitan said. "But we needn't have landed here. A month's flight would have taken us back to the Triple Suns and Dap-

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drof, or one of her sister planets. It does seem a bit unholy of us."

"I don't think you need worry too much about that, Cosmopolitan," said the second Politan. He had the heavy grayish green skin of one born while an esod was actually taking place, and was perhaps the easiest going of all the priesthood. "Look at it this way. The Triple Suns round which Dapdrof revolves only form three of the six stars in the Home Cluster. Those six stars possess between them eight worlds capable of supporting life as we know it. After Dapdrof, we count the other seven worlds as equally holy and fit for utodammp, though some of them — Buskey for instance — revolve round one of the three lesser stars of the cluster. So the criterion of what is utodammp-worthy is not that it has to revolve about one of the Triple Suns. Now we ask —"

But the Cosmopolitan, who was a better speaker than a listener, as befitted a utod in his position, cut his companion short.

"Let us ask no more, friend. I just observed that it seemed a bit unholy of us. I didn't mean any criticism. But we are setting a precedent." He scratched his grorg judicially.

With great tolerance, the third Politan said, "I agree with every word you say, Cosmopolitan. But we do not know if we are setting a precedent. Our history is so long that it may be that many and many a crew branched out into the star-realm and there, on some far planet, set up a new swamp to the glory of utodammp. Why, if we look around, we may even find utods established here."

"You persuade me utterly. In the Revolution Age, such a thing could easily have happened," said the Cosmopolitan in relief. Stretching out all six of his limbs, he waved them ceremonially to include ground and sky. "I pronounce all this to be land belonging to the Triple Suns. Let defecation commence."

They were happy. They grew even happier.

The mauve sun disappeared in disgrace, and almost at once a snowball-bright satellite wearing a rakish halo of dust sprang out of the horizon and rose swiftly above them. Used to great changes of temperature, the increasing cold of night did not worry the eight utods. In their newly built wallow, they wallowed. Their sixteen attendant grorgs wallowed with them, clinging with sucker fingers tenaciously to their hosts when the utods submerged beneath the mud.

Slowly they imbibed the feel of the new world. It lapped at their bodies, yielding up meanings incapable of translation into their terms.

In the sky overhead gleamed the Home Cluster, six stars arranged in the shape — so the least intellectual of the priestlings claimed — of one of the grails that swam the tempestuous seas of Smeksmer.

"We needn't have worried," said the Cosmopolitan happily. "The Triple Suns are still shining on us here. We needn't hurry back at all.

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Perhaps at the end of the week we'll plant a few seeds, and then move homewards."

"... at the end of next week," said the third Politan.

He lay with only the tip of one snout showing above the bubbling surface of the mud, and spoke in his submerged voice, through his ockpu orifices. With one of his unsubmerged eyes, he gazed across at the dark bulk of their star-realm ark, beautifully bulbous and black against the sky. Ah, life was good and rich, even so far away from beloved Dapdrof. Come next esod, he'd really have to change sex and become a mother; he owed it to his line; but even that ... well, as he'd often heard his mother say, to a pleasant mind, all was pleasant. He thought lovingly of his mother, and leant against her. He was as fond of her as ever since she had changed sex and become a Sacred Cosmopolitan.

Then he squealed through all orifices.

Behind the ark, lights were flashing.

The third Politan pointed this out to his companions. They all looked where he indicated.

Not lights only. A continuous growling noise.

Not only one light. Four round sources of light, cutting through the dark, and a fifth light that moved about restlessly, like a fumbling limb. It came to rest on the ark.

"I suggest that a life form is approaching," said one of the priestlings.

As he spoke, they saw more clearly. Heading along the valley towards them were two chunky shapes. From the chunky shapes came the growling noise. The chunky shapes reached the ark and stopped. The growling noise stopped.

"How interesting. They are larger than we are," said the first Politan.

Smaller shapes were climbing from the two chunky objects. Now the light that had bathed the ark turned its eye onto the wallow. In unison, to avoid being dazzled, the utods moved their vision to a more comfortable radiation band. They saw the smaller shapes — four of them there were, and thin-shaped — line up on the bank.

"If they make their own light, they must be fairly intelligent," said the Cosmopolitan. "Which do you think the life forms are — the two chunky objects with eyes, or the four thin things?"

"Perhaps the thin things are their grorgs," suggested a priestling.

"It would be only polite to get out and see," said the Cosmopolitan. He heaved his bulk up and began to move towards the four figures. His companions rose to follow him. They heard noises coming from the figures on the bank, which were now backing away.

"How delightful!" exclaimed the second Politan hurrying to get ahead. "I do believe they are trying in their primitive way to communicate!"

"What fortune that we came!" said the third Politan, but the remark was of course not aimed at the Cosmopolitan.

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"Greetings, creatures!" bellowed two of the priestlings.

And it was at that moment that the creatures on the bank raised Earth-made weapons to their hips and opened fire.

II

Captain Bargerone struck a characteristic posture. Which is to say that he stood very still with his hands hanging limply down the seams of his sky-blue shorts and rendered his face without expression. It was a form of self-control he had practiced several times on this trip, particularly when confronted by his Master Explorer.

"Do you wish me to take what you are saying seriously, Ainson?" he asked. "Or are you merely trying to delay take-off?"

Master Explorer Bruce Ainson swallowed. He was a religious man, and he silently summoned the Almighty to help him get the better of this fool who saw nothing beyond his duty.

"The two creatures we captured last night have definitely attempted to communicate with me, sir. Under space exploration definitions, anything that attempts to communicate with a man must be regarded as at least sub-human until proved otherwise."

"That is so, Captain Bargerone," Explorer Phipps said, fluttering his eyelashes nervously as he rose to the support of his boss.

"You do not need to assure me of the truth of platitudes, Mr. Phipps," the Captain said. "I merely question what you mean by 'attempt to communicate'. No doubt when you threw the creatures cabbage the act might have been interpreted as an attempt to communicate."

"The creatures did not throw me a cabbage, sir," Ainson said. "They stood quietly on the other side of the bars and spoke to me."

The captain's left eyebrow arched like a foil being tested by a master fencer.

"Spoke, Mr. Ainson? In an Earth language? In Portuguese, or perhaps Swahili?"

"In their own language, Captain Bargerone. A series of whistles, grunts, and squeaks often rising above audible level. Nevertheless, a language — possibly a language vastly more complex than ours."

"On what do you base that deduction, Mr. Ainson?"

The Master Explorer was not floored by the question, but the lines gathered more thickly about his rough-hewn and sorrowful face.

"On observation. Our men surprised eight of those creatures, sir, and promptly shot six of them. You should have read the patrol report. The other two creatures were so stunned by surprise that they were easily netted and brought back here into the *Mariestopes*. In the circumstances, the preoccupation of any form of life would be to seek mercy, or release if possible. In other words, it would supplicate. Unfortunately, up till now we have met no other form of intelligent life in the pocket of the galaxy near Earth; but all human races supplicate in the same way — by using gesture as

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well as verbal pleas. These creatures do not use gesture. Their language must be so rich in nuance that they have no need for gesture, even when begging for their lives."

Captain Bargerone gave an excruciatingly civilized snort.

"Then you can be sure that they were not begging for their lives. Just what did they do, apart from whining as caged dogs would do?"

"I think you should come down and see them for yourself, sir."

"I saw the dirty creatures last night and have no wish to see them again. Of course I recognize that they form a valuable discovery; I said as much to the patrol leader. They will be off-loaded at the London Exozoo, Mr. Ainson, as soon as we get back to Earth, and then you can talk to them as much as you wish. But as I said in the first place, and as you know, it is time for us to leave this planet straight away. I can allow you no further time for exploration. Kindly remember this is a private Company ship, not a Corps ship, and we have a timetable to keep to. We've wasted a whole week on this miserable globe without finding a living thing larger than a mouse dropping, and I cannot allow you another twelve hours here."

Bruce Ainson drew himself up. Behind him, Phipps sketched an unnoticed pastiche of the gesture.

"Then you must leave without me, sir. And without Phipps. Unfortunately neither of us was on the patrol last night, and it is essential that we investigate the spot where these creatures were captured. You must see that the whole point of the expedition will be lost if we have no idea of their habitat. Knowledge is more important than timetables."

"There is a war on, Mr. Ainson, and I have my orders."

"Then you will have to leave without me, sir. I don't know how the USGN will like that."

The captain knew how to give in without appearing beaten.

"We leave in six hours, Mr. Ainson. What you and your subordinate do until then is your affair."

"Thank you, sir," said Ainson. He gave it as much edge as he dared.

Hurrying from the captain's office, he and Phipps caught a lift down to disembarkation deck and walked down the ramp onto the surface of the planet provisionally labelled 12B.

The men's canteen was still functioning. There the two explorers collected Hank Quilter, the surly-cheerful young man who had led the patrol of the previous night. Quilter fetched a thin youth named Walthamstone who had also been on the patrol, and the four of them walked over to the motor pool — being demolished amid shouting preparatory to take-off — to collect an overlander.

Ainson signed for the vehicle, and they drove off with Walthamstone at the wheel and Phipps distributing weapons. The latter said, "Bargerone hasn't given us much time, Bruce. What do you hope to find?"

"I want to examine the site where the creatures were found. Of course I would like to find something that

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would make Bargerone eat humble pie." He caught Phipps' warning side glance at the men and said sharply, "Quilter, you were in charge last night. Your trigger finger was a bit itchy, wasn't it? Did you think you were in the Wild West?"

Quilter turned round to give his superior a look.

"Captain complimented me this morning," was all he said.

Dropping that line of approach, Ainson said, "These beasts may not look intelligent, but if one is sensitive, one can *feel* a certain something about them. They show no panic, nor fear of any kind."

"Could be as much a sign of stupidity as intelligence," Phipps said.

"Mm, possibly, I suppose. All the same . . . another thing, Gussie, that seems worth pursuing. Whatever the standing of these creatures may be, they don't fit with the larger animals we've discovered on other planets so far. Oh, I know we've only found a couple of dozen planets harboring any sort of life — dash it, star travel isn't thirty years old yet. But it does seem as if light-gravity planets breed light spindly beings and heavy planets breed bulky compact beings. And these critters are exceptions to the rule."

"I see what you mean. This world has not much more mass than Mars, yet our bag are made like rhinoceroses."

"They were all wallowing in the mud like rhinos when we found them," Quilter offered. "How could they have any intelligence?"

"You shouldn't have shot them down like that. They must be rare, or we'd have spotted some elsewhere on 12B before this."

"You don't stop to think when you're on the receiving end of a rhino charge," Quilter sulked.

"So I see."

They rumbled over an unkempt plain in silence. Ainson tried to recapture the happiness he had experienced on first walking across this untrod planet. New planets always renewed his pleasure in life; but such pleasures had been spoiled this voyage — spoiled, as usual, by other people. He had been mistaken to ship on a company boat. Life on Space Corps boats was more rigid and simple; unfortunately, the Brazilian-British war engaged all Corps ships, keeping them from such peaceful enterprises as exploration. Nevertheless, he did not deserve a captain like Edgar Bargerone.

Pity Bargerone did not blast off and leave him here by himself, Ainson thought. Away from people, communing— he recollected his father's phrase — communing with nature!

The people would come to 12B. Soon enough it would have, like Earth, its overpopulation problems. That was why it was explored: with a view to colonization. Sites for the first communities had been marked out on the other side of the world. In a couple of years, the poor wretches forced by economic necessity to leave all they held dear on Earth would be transhipped to 12B. But they would have a pretty and tempting colonial name for it by then: Clementine, or some-

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thing equally obnoxiously innocuous.

Yes, they'd tackle this unkempt plain with all the pluck of their species, turning it into a heaven of dirt-farming and semi-detacheds. Too much procreation went on. Earth's teeming loins had to ejaculate once again, ejaculate its unwanted progeny onto the virgin planets that lay awaiting — what else?

Christ, what else? There must *be* something else, or we should all have stayed in the nice green harmless Pleistocene.

Ainson's rancid thoughts were broken by Walthamstone's saying, "There's the river. Just round the corner, and then we're there."

They rounded low banks of gravel from which thorn trees grew. Overhead, a mauve sun gleamed damply through haze at them. It raised a shimmer of reflection from the jagged leaves of a million million thistles growing silently all the way to the river and on the other side of it as far as the eye wanted to see. Only one landmark: a big blunt odd-shaped thing straight ahead.

"It —" said Phipps and Ainson together. They stared at each other. "—looks like one of the creatures."

"The mudhole where we caught them is just the other side," Waltsamstone said. He bumped the overlander across the thistle bed, braking in the shadow of the looming object, forlorn and strange as a chunk of Liberian carving lying on an Aberdeen mantleshelf.

Toting their rifles, they jumped out and moved forward.

They stood on the edge of the mudhole and surveyed it. One side of the circle was sucked by the gray lips of the river. The mud itself was brown and pasty green, streaked liberally with red where five big carcasses took their last wallow in the carefree postures of death. The sixth body gave a heave and turned a head in their direction.

A cloud of flies rose in anger at this disturbance. Quilter brought up his rifle, turning a grim face to Ainson when the latter caught his arm.

"Don't kill it," Ainson said. "It's wounded. It can't harm us."

"We can't assume that. Let me finish it off."

"I said not, Quilter. We'll get it into the back of the overlander and take it to the ship. We'd better collect the dead ones too. Then they can be cut up and their anatomy studied. They'd never forgive us on Earth if we lost such an opportunity. You and Walthamstone get the nets out of the lockers and haul the bodies up."

Quilter looked challengingly at his watch and at Ainson.

"Get moving," Ainson ordered.

Reluctantly, Walthamstone slouched forward to do as he was told. Quilter followed suit. They hauled the nets out and went to stand on the edge of the mud pool, gazing across it at the half-submerged evidence of last night's activities before they got down to work. The sight of the carnage mollified Quilter.

"We sure stopped them!" he said. He was a muscular young man, his

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fair hair neatly cropped, with a dear old white-haired mother back home in Miami who pulled in an annual fortune in alimony.

"Yeah. They'd have got us otherwise," Walthamstone said. "Two of them I shot myself. Must have been those two nearest to us."

"I killed two of them; too," Quilter said. "They were all wallowing in the mud like rhinos. Boy, did they come at us!"

"Dirty things when you come to look at them. Ugly. Worse than anything we've got on Earth. Aren't half glad we plugged them, aren't you, Quil?"

"It was us or them. We didn't have any choice."

"You're right there." Walthamstone cuddled his chin and looked admiringly at his friend. You had to admit Quilter was quite a lad. He repeated Quilter's phrase, "We didn't have any choice."

"What the hell good are they, I'd like to know."

"So'd I. We really stopped them, though, didn't we?"

"It was us or them," repeated Quilter. The flies rose again as he paddled into the mud towards the wounded rhinoman.

While this philosophical skirmish was in progress, Bruce Ainson stalked over to the object that marked the scene of the slaughter. It loomed above him. He was impressed. This shape, like the shape of the creatures it appeared to imitate, had more than its size to impress him; there was something about it that affected him aesthetically. It might be a hundred light-years high and it'd still be—don't say beauty doesn't exist! — beautiful.

He climbed into the beautiful object. It stank to high heaven; and that was where it had been intended for. Five minutes' inspection left him in no doubt: this was a . . . well, it looked like an overgrown seedpod, and it had the feel of an overgrown seedpod, but it was — Captain Bargerone had to see this: this was a spaceship.

A spaceship loaded high with ripe manure.

Much happened during the year 1999 on Earth.

Quins were born to a twenty-year-old mother in Kennedyville, Mars. A robot team was admitted for the first time into the World series. New Zealand launched its own system-ship. The first Spanish nuclear submarine was launched by a Spanish princess. There were two one-day revolutions in Java, six in Sumatra and seven in South America. Brazil declared war on Great Britain. Common Europe beat the U. S. S. R. at football. A Japanese screen star married the Shah of Persia. The gallant All-Texan expedition attempting to cross the bright side of Mercury in exotanks perished to a man. All-Africa set up its first radio-controlled whale farm. And a little grizzled Australian mathematician called Buzzard rushed into his mistress's room at three o'clock of a May morning shrieking, "Got it, got it! Transponential flight!"

Within two years, the first unmanned and experimental transpon-

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ential drive had been built into a rocket, launched, and proved successful. They never got that one back.

This is not the place for an explanation of TP formulae; the publisher, in any case, refuses to set three pages of math symbols. Suffice it to say that a favorite science-fiction gimmick — to the dismay and subsequent bankruptcy of all science-fiction writers — was suddenly translated into actuality. Thanks to Buzzard, the gulfs of space became not barriers between but doorways to the planets. By 2010, you could get from New York to Procyon more comfortably and quickly than it had taken, a century before, to get from New York to Paris.

That is what's so tedious about progress. Nobody seems able to jog it out of that dreary old exponential curve.

All of which goes to show that while the trip between B12 and Earth took less than a fortnight by the year 2035, that still left plenty of time for letter writing.

Or — in Captain Bargerone's case, as he composed a TP cable to their lordships in the Admiralty —for cable writing.

In the first week he cabled:

TP POSITION: 335O73X 6915 (B12). YOUR CABLE EX97747304 REFERS. YOUR ORDER COMPLIED WITH. HENCEFORTH CREATURES CAPTIVE ABOARD KNOWN AS EXTRATERRESTIAL ALIENS (SHORTENED TO ETAS).

SITUATION REGARDING ETAS AS FOLLOWS. TWO ALIVE AND WELL IN NUMBER THREE HOLD. FOUR CARCASSES BEING DISSECTED TO STUDY THEIR ANATOMY. AT FIRST I DID NOT REALIZE THEY WERE MORE THAN ANIMALS. DIRECTLY MASTER EXPLORER AINSON EXPLAINED SITUATION TO ME, I ORDERED HIM TO PROCEED WITH PARTY TO SCENE OF CAPTURE OF ETAS.

THERE WE FOUND EVIDENCE THAT ETAS HAVE INTELLIGENCE. SPACESHIP OF STRANGE MANUFACTURE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. IT IS NOW IN MAIN CARGO HOLD AFTER REDISTRIBUTION OF CARGO. SMALL SHIP CAPABLE OF HOLDING ONLY FIGURE 8 ETAS. NO DOUBT SHIP BELONGS ETAS. SAME FILTH OVER EVERYTHING. SAME OFFENSIVE SMELL. EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT ETAS ALSO EXPLORING B12.

HAVE ORDERED AINSON AND HIS STAFF TO COMMUNICATE WITH ETAS SOONEST. HOPE TO HAVE LANGUAGE PROBLEM CRACKED BEFORE LANDING.

EDGAR BARGERONE.
CAPT. MARIESTOPES
GMT 1750:6.7.2035

Other prosodists were busy aboard the *Mariestopes*.

Walthamstone wrote laborously to an aunt in a far-flung western suburb of the city of London called Windsor:

My dear old aunt Flo—

We are now coming home to see you again, how is your ruhmatism, looking up I hope. I have not been space sick this voyage. When the ship goes into TP drive if you know what that is you feel a bit sick for a couple of hours. My pal Quilt says that's because all your molecules go negative. But then you're all right.

When we stopped at one planet which hasn't got no name because we were the first, Quilt and me had a chance to go hunt-

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ing. The place is swarming with big fierce dirty animals almost as big as the ship. It lives in mudholes. We shot dozens. We got two alive ones on board this old tub, we call them rhinomen, their names are Gertie and Mush. They are filthy. I have to clean out their cages but they don't bite. They make a lot of rude noises.

As usual the food is bad. Not only poison but small helpings. Give my love to cousin Madge, I wonder if her edducation is completed yet. Whose winning the war with Brazil, us I hope!!

Hoping this leaves you as it finds me at present, your loving nephew,

Rodney

Augustus Phipps was composing a love letter to a Sino-Portuguese girl in Macao:

Ah Chi darling,

This brave old bus is now pointing towards Macao. My heart as you know is permanently oriented (no pun intended) towards that fair place when you are holidaying there, but how good to know we shall soon be together in more than spirit.

I'm hoping this trip will bring us fame and fortune. For we have found a sort of strange life out here in this neck of the galaxy, and are bringing two live samples of it home. When I think of you, so slender, sweet and immaculate in your cheongsam, I wonder why we need such dirty ugly beasts on the same planet—but science must be served.

Wonder of wonders! They're supposed to be intelligent according to my superior, and we are presently engaged in trying to talk to them. No, don't laugh, pretty though I remember your laughter to be. How I long for the moment I can talk to you, my sweet and passionate Ah Chi; and of course not only talk!

Until we can do the same sort of thing again,

Your devoted
adoring
admiring
pulsating
Augustus

Meanwhile, down on the mess-deck of the *Mariestopes*, Quilter also was wrestling with the problem of communicating with a girl:

Hi honey!

Right now as I write I am heading straight back to Dodge City as fast as the light waves will carry me. Got the captain and the boys along with me too, but I'll be shedding them before I drop in at 1477 Rainbow.

Beneath a brave exterior, your lover boy is feeling sour way up to here. These beasts, the rhinomen I was telling you about, they are the filthiest things you ever saw, and I can't tell you about it in the mails. Guess it's because you like me I know have always taken a pride in being modern and hygenic, but these things they're worse than animals.

This has finished me for the Exploration Corps. At trip's end, I quit and shall remuster in the Space Corps. You can get places in the Space Corps. As witness our Captain Barger-

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one, jumped up from nowhere. His father is caretaker or something at a block of flats Amsterdam way. Well, that's democracy. Guess I'll try some myself, maybe wind up captain myself. Why not?

This seems to be written all around me, honey. When I get home you bet I'll be all around you.

Your lovingest chewingest
Hank

In his cabin on B deck, Master Explorer Bruce Ainson wrote soberly to his wife:

My dearest Enid,

How often I pray that your ordeal with Aylmer may now be over. You have done all you can for the boy, never reproach yourself on that score. He is a disgrace to our name. Heaven alone knows what will become of him. I fear he is as dirty-minded as he is dirty in his personal habits.

My regret is that I have to be away so long, particularly when a son of ours is causing so much trouble. But a consolation is that at last this trip has become rewarding. We have located a major life form. Under my supervision, two live individuals of this form have been brought aboard this ship. ETAs we call them.

You will be considerably more surprised when I tell you that these individuals, despite their strange appearance and habits, appear to manifest intelligence. More than that, they seem to be a space seafaring race. We captured a spaceship that undoubtedly is connected with them, though whether they actually control the craft is at present undecided. I am attempting to communicate with them, but as yet without success.

Let me describe the ETAs to you—rhinomen, the crew call them, and until a better designation is arrived at, that will do. The rhinomen walk on six limbs. The six limbs each terminate in very capable hands, widespread, but each bearing six digits, of which the first and last are opposed and may be regarded as thumbs. The rhinomen are omnidextrous. When not in use, the limbs are retracted into the hide rather like a tortoise's legs, and are then barely noticeable.

With its limbs retracted, a rhinoman is symmetrical and shaped roughly like two segments of an orange adhering together, the shallow curve representing the creature's spine, the fuller curve its belly, and the two apices its two heads Yes, our captives appear to be two-headed. The heads come to a point and are neckless, though they can swivel through several degrees. In each head is set two eyes, small and dark in color, with lower lids that slide upward to cover the eyes during sleep. Beneath the eyes are orifices which look alike; one is the rhinoman's mouth, one his anus. There are also several orifices puncturing the expanse of body; these may be breathing tubes. The exobiologists are dissecting some corpses we have aboard with us. When I get their report, several things should be clearer.

Our captives encompass a wide

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range of sounds, ranging through whistles and screams to grunts and smacking noises. I fear that all orifices are able to contribute to this gamut of sound, some of which, I feel convinced, goes above man's auditory threshold. As yet neither of our specimens is communicative though all the sounds they make to each other are automatically recorded; but I am sure this is merely due to the shock of capture, and that on Earth, with more time, and in a more congenial environment where we can keep them more hygienically, we shall soon begin to obtain positive results.

As ever, these long voyages are tedious. I avoid the captain as much as I can; an unpleasant man, with public school and Cambridge written all over him. I immerse myself in our two ETAs. For all their unpleasant habits, they have a fascination my human companions lack.

There will be much to talk about on my return.

Your loving husband,
Bruce

Down in the main cargo hold, safely away from all the letter writing, a mixed bag of men of all trades was stripping the ETA spaceship and pulling it to pieces splinter by splinter.

For the strange craft was made of wood. Wood of an unknown toughness, wood of an unknown resilience, wood as tough and durable as steel — yet wood which on the inside, for it was shaped like a great pod, sprouted a variety of branches like horns, on which grew a lowly type of parasitic plant. One of the triumphs of the botanical team was the discovery that this parasite was not the natural foliage of the horn-branches but an alien growing thereon.

They also discovered that the parasite was a glutton for absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and exuding oxygen. They scraped bits of the parasite from the horn-branches and attempted to grow it in more favorable conditions; the plant died. At the current one hundred and thirty-fourth attempt, it was still dying, but the men in Bot were noted for stubbornness.

The interior of the ship was caked with filth of a certain rich consistency made up chiefly of mud and excrement. When comparing this dirty little wooden coracle with the gleamingly clean *Mariestopes*, it would have been impossible for any rational individual — and rational individuals exist even amid the incarcerations of space travel — to imagine that both craft were constructed for the same purpose. Indeed, many of the crew, and notably those who prided themselves on their rationality, were loud in their laughter as they refused to concede that the alien artifact was anything but a well-frequented latrine.

Discovering the drive quenched about ninety-eight per cent of the laughter. Under the mire the motor lay, a strange distorted thing no bigger than a rhinoman. It was snugged into the wooden hull without visible welding and bolting; it was made of a substance outwardly resembling porcelain; it had no

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moving parts; and a ceramicist followed it weeping with a wild surmise into the engineering labs when the unit was finally drilled and grilled from the hull.

The next discovery was a bunch of great nuts that clung to the two peaks of the roof with a tenacity that defied the best flame cutters. A least, some said they were nuts, for a fibrous husk covering them suggested the fruits of the coconut palm. But when it was perceived that the ribs running down from the nuts which had hitherto been regarded as wall strengtheners were connected with the drive, several sages declared the nuts to be fuel tanks.

The next discovery put an end to discoveries for a time. An artisan chipping at a hardened bank of dirt discovered, entombed within it, a dead ETA. Thereupon the men gathered together and made emotional noises.

"How much longer are we going to stand for this, fellows?" cried Interior Rating Ginger Duffield, jumping onto a tool box and showing them white teeth and black fists. "This is a company ship, not a Corps ship! We don't have to put up with just any old treatment they care to give us. There's nothing down in regulations says we have to clean out alien tombs and bogs. I'm downing tools till we get Dirty Pay, and I demand you lot join me!"

"Yes, make the company pay!"

"Who do they think we are!"

"Let 'em clean out their own stink holes!"

"More pay! Time and a half, boys!"

"Get knotted, Duffield, you ruddy trouble maker."

"What does the sergeant say?"

Sergeant Warrick elbowed his way through the bunch of men and stood looking up at Ginger Duffield.

"Duffield, I know your sort. You ought to be out on the Deep Freeze Planet, helping to win the war. We don't want none of your factory tactics here. Climb down off that box and let's all get back to work. A bit of dirt won't harm your lily white hands."

Duffield spoke very quietly and nicely.

"I'm not looking for any trouble, sarge. Why should we do it, that's all I say. Don't know what dangerous disease is lurking in this little cess pit. We want danger money for working in it. Why should we risk our necks for the company? What's the company done for us?" A rumble of approval greeted this question, but Duffield affected to take no notice of it. "What're they going to do when we get home? Why, they're going to put this stinking alien box on show, and everyone's going to come and have a look and a sniff at ten tubbies a time. They're going to make their fortune out of this and out of those animals that lived in it. So why shouldn't we have our little bite now? You just push along to C Deck and bring the Union man to see us, hey, sarge, and keep that nose of yours out of trouble, hey?"

"You're nothing but a flaming trouble-maker, Duffield, that's your

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trouble," the sergeant said angrily. He pushed through the men, heading for C Deck. Mocking cheers followed him into the corridor.

Two watches later, Quilter, armed with hose and brush, entered the cage containing the two ETAs. They sprouted their limbs and moved to the far end of the confined space, watching him hopefully.

"This is the last clean-out you guys are going to get from me," Quilter told them. "At the end of this watch, I'm joining the walkout, just to demonstrate my solidarity with the Space Corps. After this, as far as I'm concerned, you can sleep in manure as deep as the Pacific."

With the fun-loving ebullience of youth, he turned the hose onto them.

V

The news editor of the "Windsor Circuit" struck the pedal bar of his technivision and scowled at the representation of his chief reporter's face as it faded onto the screen.

"Where the hell are you, Adrian? Get down to the bloody spaceport as you were told. The *Mariestopes* is due in within half an hour."

The left half of Adrian Bucker's countenance screwed itself into a wince. He leant nearer to his screen until his nose opaqued and the vision misted and said, "Don't be like that, Ralph. I've got a local angle on the trip that you'll fairly lap up."

"I don't want a local angle, I want you down at that ruddy spaceport right away, my lad."

Bucker winced the right side of his face and began talking fast.

"Listen, Ralph. I'm in the Angel's Head — the pub right on the Thames. I've got an old girl here called Florence Walthamstone. She's lived in Windsor all her life, remembers when the Great Park was a park, all that sort of stuff. She's got a nephew called Rodney Walthamstone who's a rating on the *Mariestopes*. She's just been showing me a letter from him in which he describes these alien animals they're bringing home, and I thought if we ran a picture of her, with a quote from the letter — you know, Local Lad Helps Capture Those Monsters — it would look —"

"That's enough, I've heard enough. This thing's the biggest news of the decade and you imagine we need a local angle to put it over? Give the old girl her letter back, thank her very much for the offer, pay for her drink, pat her dear wrinkled cheeks, and then get down to that bloody spaceport or I'll have your skin for flypaper."

"Okay, okay, Ralph, have it the way you want it. There was a time when you were open to suggestions." Having cut the circuit, Bucker added, "And I've got one I could make right now."

He pushed out of the booth, and jostled his way through a heavy-bodied, heavy-drinking mass of men and women to a tall old woman crushed into the corner of the bar.

"Was your editor excited?" she asked.

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"Stood on his head. Look, Miss Walthamstone, I'm sorry about this, but I've got to get down to the spaceport. Perhaps we can do a special interview with you later. Now I've got your number; don't bother to ring us, we'll ring you, right, eh? Very nice to meet you."

As he gulped the last of his drink down. she said, "Oh, but you ought to let me pay for that one, Mr. —"

"Very kind of you, if you insist, Miss Walthamstone. 'Bye then."

He flung himself among the filling stomachs. She called his name. He looked back furiously from the middle of the fray.

"Have a word with Rodney if you see him. He'd be ever so glad to tell you anything. He's a very nice boy."

He fought his way to the door, muttering, "Excuse me, excuse me," over and over, like a curse.

The reception bays at the space port were crowded. Ordinary and extraordinary citizens packed every roof and window. In a roped-off section of the tarmac, stood representatives of various governments, including the Minister for Martian Affairs, and of various services, including the Director of the London Exozoo. Beyond the enclosure, the band of a well-known regiment, uniformed in anachronistically bright colors, marched about playing Suppe's Light Cavalry Overture and selections of Irish melodies. Ice cream was hawked, newspapers were sold, pockets were picked. The *Mariestopes* slid through a layer of nimbostratus and settled on its haunches in a distant part of the field.

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It began to rain.

The band embarked on a lively rendering of the twentieth century air *Sentimental Journey*, without adding much luster to the proceedings. As such occasions usually are, this occasion was dull, its interest diffused. The spraying of the entire hull of the ship with germicidal sprays took some while. A hatch opened, a little overalled figure appeared in the opening, was cheered, and disappeared again, A thousand children asked if that was Captain Bargerone and were told not to be silly.

At length a ramp came out like a reluctant tongue and lolled against the ground. Transport — three small buses, two trucks, an ambulance, various luggage tenders, a private car, and several military vehicles — converged onto the great ship from different parts of the port. And finally a line of human beings began to move hastily down the ramp with bowed heads and dive into the shelter of the vehicles. The crowd cheered; it had come to cheer.

In a reception hall, the gentlemen of the press had made the air blue with the smoke of their mescahales before Captain Bargerone was thrust in upon them. Flashes sizzled and danced as he smiled defensively at them.

With some of his officers standing behind him, he stood and spoke quietly and unsensationally in a very English way (Bargerone was French) about how much space there was out there and how many worlds

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there were and how devoted his crew had been except for an unfortunate strike on the way home for which someone, he hoped, was going to get it hot; and he finished by saying that on a very pleasant planet which the USGN had graciously decided should be known as Clementina they had captured or killed some large animals with interesting characteristics. Some of these characteristics he described. The animals had two heads, each of which held a brain. The two brains together weighed 2,000 grams — a quarter more than man's. These animals, ETAs or rhinomen, as the crew called them, had six limbs which ended in undoubted equivalents of hands. Unfortunately the strike had hindered the study of the remarkable creatures, but there seemed a fair reason to suppose that they had a language of their own and must therefore, despite their ugliness and dirty habits, be regarded as more or less — but of course nobody could be certain as yet, and it might take many months of patient research before we could be certain — as an intelligent form of life on a par with man and capable of having a civilization of their own, on a planet as yet unknown to man. Two of them were preserved in captivity and would go to the Exozoo for study.

When the speech was over, reporters closed round Bargerone.

"You're saying these rhinos don't live on Clementina?"

"We have reason to suppose not."

"What reason?"

("Smile for the *Subud Times*, please, Captain.")

"We think they were on a visit there, just as we were."

"You mean they travelled in a spaceship?"

"In a sense, yes. But they may just have been taken along on the trip as experimental animals — or dumped there, like Captain Cook's pigs dumped on Tahiti or wherever it was."

("More profile, Captain, if you please.")

"Well, did you see their spaceship?"

"Er, well, we think we actually have . . . er, their spaceship in our hold."

"Give, then, Captain, this is big! Why the secrecy? Have you captured their spaceship or have you not?"

("And over this way, sir.")

"We think we have. That is it has the properties of a spaceship, but it, er — no TP drive naturally, but an interesting drive, and, well, it sounds silly but you see the hull is made of wood. A very high density wood." Captain Bargerone wiped his face clear of expression.

"Oh, now look, Captain! You're joking . . ."

In the mob of photographers, phototects, and reporters, Adrian Bucker could get nowhere near the captain. He elbowed his way across to a tall nervous man who stood behind Bargerone, scowling out of one of the long windows at the crowds milling about in the light rain.

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"Would you tell me how you feel about these aliens you brought back to Earth, sir?" Bucker asked. "Are they animals or are they people?"

Hardly hearing, Bruce Ainson sent his gaze probing over the crowds outside. He thought he had caught a glimpse of his good-for-nothing son, Aylmer, wearing his usual hangdog expression as he plunged through the mob.

"Swine," he said.

"You mean they look like swine or they act like swine?"

The explorer turned to stare at the reporter.

"I'm Bucker of the *Windsor Circuit,* sir. My paper would be interested in anything you could tell us about these creatures. You think they are animals, am I right?"

"What would you say mankind is, Mr. Buckler, civilized beings or animals? Have we ever met a new race without corrupting it or destroying it? Look at the Polynesians, the Guances, the American Indians, the Tasmanians . . ."

"Yes, sir, I get your point, but would you say these aliens . . ."

"Oh, they have intelligence, as has any mammal; these are mammals. But their behavior or lack of behavior is baffling because we must not think anthropomorphically about them. Have they ethics, have they consciences? Are they capable of being corrupted as the Eskimos and Indians were? Are they perhaps capable of corrupting us? We have to ask ourselves a lot of searching questions before we are capable of seeing these rhinomen clearly. That is my feeling on the matter."

"That is very interesting. What you are saying is that we have to develop a new way of thinking?"

"No, no, no! I hardly think this is a problem I can discuss with a newspaper representative, but man places too much trust in his intellect; what we need is a new way of feeling, a more reverent . . . I was getting somewhere with those two unhappy creatures we have captive — establishing trust, you know, after we had slaughtered their companions and taken them prisoner, and what is happening to them now? They're going to be a sideshow in the Exozoo. The Director, Sir Mihaly Pasztor, is an old friend of mine; I shall complain to him."

"Heck, people want to see the beasts! How do we know they have feelings like ours?"

"Your view, Mr. Bucket, is probably the view of the damn fool majority. Excuse me, I have a technicall to make."

Ainson hurried from the building, where the wedge of people instantly closed in and held him tight. He stood helpless there while a lorry moved slowly by, buoyed along with cheers, cries and exclamations from the onlookers. Through the bars at the back of the lorry, the two ETAs stared down on the onlookers. They made no sound. They were large and gray, beings at once forlorn and formidable.

Their gaze rested momentarily on Bruce Ainson. They gave no sign of recognition. Suddenly chilled, he turned and began to worm his way through the press of wet mackintoshes.

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VI

Pasztor, Director of the London Exozoo, was a fine willowy man without a gray hair on his head despite his fifty-two years. Hungarian by birth, he had led an expedition into the submarine Antarctic by the time he was twenty-five. had gone on to set up the Tellus Zoological Dome on the asteroid Apollo in 2005, and had written the most-viewed technidrama of 2014, *An Iceberg for Icarus.* Several years later he went on the First Charon Expedition, which charted and landed upon that then newly discovered planet of the solar system; Charon refrigerates so unlovably some three thousand million miles beyond the orbit of Pluto that it earned the name of Deep Freeze Planet. Pasztor had given it that nickname.

After which triumph, Sir Mihaly Pasztor was appointed Director of the London Exozoo and was at present employed in offering Bruce Ainson a drink.

"You know I don't, Mihaly," Bruce said, shaking his long head in reproof.

"From now on you are a famous man. You should toast your own success, as we toast it."

"You know me of old, Mihaly. I wish only to do my duty."

"I know you of old, Bruce. I know that you care very little for the opinions or the applause of anyone else, so thirstily do you crave for the nod of approval from your own superego," the Director said in a mild voice, while the bartender mixed him the cocktail known as a Transponential. They were at the reception being held at the hotel belonging to the Exozoo, where murals of exotic beasts stared down on a bracing mixture of bright uniforms and flowery dresses.

"I do not stand in need of tidbits from your well of wisdom," Ainson said.

"You will not allow that you have need of anything from anybody," said the Director. "I have meant to say this to you for a long while, Bruce — though this is neither the time nor the place, let me continue now I have begun. You are a brave, learned, and formidable man. That you have proved not only to the world but to yourself. You can now afford to relax, to let down your guard. Not only can you now afford to do so; you ought to do so before it is too late. A man has to have an interior, Bruce, and yours is dying of suffocation."

"For heavens' sake, man!" Ainson exclaimed, breaking away half laughing, half angry. "You are talking like an impossibly romantic character in one of the plays of your nonage! I am what I am, and I am no different from what I have always been. Now here comes Enid, and it is high time we changed the subject."

When the Master Explorer had settled the wrap about his wife's shoulders, Mihaly led them out of the hall by a side door. They walked along a carpeted corridor, downstairs, and out into the dusk. The zoo lay quiet, though one

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or two London starlings moved belatedly to bed among the trees, and from its heated pool a Rungsted's sauropod raised its neck to gaze in a dim wonder at their passage. Turning before they reached the Methane Mammal House, Pasztor led his companions to a new block constructed in the modern manner of sanded reinforced plastic blocks and strawed concrete with lead verticals. As they entered by a side door, lights came on.

Reinforced curving glass separated them from the two ETAs. The creatures turned about as the lights came on, to watch the humans. Ainson made a half-hearted gesture of recognition towards them; it produced no perceptible reaction.

"At least they have spacious accommodation," he said. "Does the public have to throng through here all day, pressing its beastly noses to the glass?"

"The public will only be admitted to this block between 2:30 and 4 in the afternoon," Pasztor said. "In the mornings, experts will be here studying our visitors."

The visitors had an ample double cage, the two parts separated by a low door. At the back of one room was a wide low bed padded with a plastic foam. Troughs filled with food and water lined one of the other walls. The ETAs stood in the center of the floor; they had already amassed a fair amount of dirt about them.

Three lizard-like animals scuttled across the floor and flung themselves onto the massive bodies of the ETAs. They scuttled for a fold of skin and disappeared. Ainson pointed towards them.

"You see that? Then they are still there. They look very like lizards. I believe there are four of them all together; they keep close to the extra-terrestrials. There were two of them accompanying the dying ETA we took aboard the *Mariestopes*. Probably they are synoecists or even symbionts. The fool of a captain heard of them from my reports and wanted them destroyed — said they might be dangerous parasites — but I stood out against him."

"Who was that? Edgar Bargerone?" Pastzor asked. "A brave man, not brilliant; he probably still clings to the geocentric conception of the universe."

"He wanted me to be communicating with these fellows before we touched Earth! He has no conception of the problems confronting us."

Enid, who had been watching the captives intently, looked up and asked, "Are you going to be able to communicate with them?"

"The question is not as simple as it would appear to a layman, my dear. I'll tell you all about it another time."

"For God's sake, Bruce, I'm not a child. Are you or aren't you going to be able to communicate with them?"

The Master Explorer tucked his hands into the hip flounces of his uniform and regarded his wife. When he spoke, it was smouldering-ly, as a preacher from the elevation of a pulpit.

"With a quarter of a century's

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stellar exploration behind us, Enid, the nations of Earth — despite the fact that the total number of operational starships at any one time rarely exceeds a dozen — have managed to survey about three hundred roughly Earth-type planets. On those three hundred planets, Enid, they have sometimes found sentient life and sometimes not. But they have never found beings that could be regarded as having any more brain than a chimpanzee. Now we have discovered these creatures on Clementina, and we have our reasons for suspecting that they may possess an intelligence equivalent to man's— the main circumstantial reasons being that they have an, er, machine capable of travelling between planets."

"Why make such a mystery of it, then?" Enid asked. "There are fairly simple tests devised for this situation; why not apply them? Do these creatures have a written script? Do they talk with each other? Do they observe a code between themselves? Are they able to repeat a simple demonstration or a set of gestures? Do they respond to simple mathematical concepts? What is their attitude towards human artifacts — and, of course, have they artifacts of their own? How do —"

"Yes, yes, my dear, we entirely take your point. There are tests to be applied. I was not idle on the voyage home; I applied the tests."

"Well, then, the results?"

"Conflicting. Conflicting in a way that suggests that the tests we applied were inefficient and insufficient — in a word, too steeped in anthropomorphism. And that is the point I was trying to make. Until we can define intelligence more nearly, we are not going to find it easy to begin communicating."

"At the same time," Pasztor supplemented, "you are going to find it hard to define intelligence until you have succeeded in communicating."

Ainson brushed this aside with the gesture of a practical man cutting through sophisms.

"First we define intelligence. Is the little spider, argyroneta aquatica, intelligent because she can build a diving bell and thus live underwater? No. Very well, then these lumbering creatures may be no more intelligent because they can construct a spaceship. On the other hand, these creatures may be so highly intelligent, and the end-products of a civilization so ancient, that all the reasoning we conduct in our conscious minds, they conduct in their hereditary or subconscious minds, leaving their conscious minds free for cogitation on matters — and indeed for forms of cogitation — beyond our understanding. If that is so, communication between our species may be forever out of the question. Remember that one dictionary definition of intelligence is simply 'information received'. If we receive no information from them, and they none from us, then we are entitled to say these ETAs are unintelligent."

"This is all very puzzling to me," Enid said. "You make it sound so difficult now, yet in your letters

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you made it sound so simple. You said these creatures had come up and attempted to communicate with you in a series of grunts and whistles; you said they each possessed six excellent hands; you said they had arrived on what's it — on Clementina, by spaceship. Surely the situation is clear. They are intelligent; not simply with the limited intelligence of an animal, but intelligent enough to have produced a civilization and a language. The only problem is to translate their noises and whistles into English."

Ainson turned to the Director.

"You understand why it isn't so easy, don't you, Mihaly?"

"Well, I have read most of your reports, Bruce. I know these are mammals with respiratory systems and digestive tracts much like ours, that they have brains with a similar weight ratio to our own, that possessing hands they would approach the universe with the same basic feeling we have that matter is there to be manipulated — no, frankly, Bruce, I can see that to learn their language or to get them to learn ours may be a difficult task, but I do feel you are overestimating the hazards of the case."

"Do you? You wait till you've observed these fellows for a while. You'll feel differently. I tell you, Mihaly, I try to put myself in their place, and despite their disgusting habits I have managed to preserve sympathy towards them. But the only feeling I get — amid an ocean of frustration — is that they must, if they are intelligent at all, have a very different point of view of the universe from ours. Really, you'd imagine they were —" he gestured at them, calm behind the glass — "holding themselves aloof from me."

"We shall have to see how the linguists get on," Pasztor said. "And Bryant Lattimore of USGN Flight Advice — he's a very forceful man — I think you'll like him — arrives from the States tomorrow. His views will be worth having." It was not the remark to please Bruce Ainson. He decided he had had enough of the subject.

"It's ten o'clock," he said. "Time Enid and I were going home."

The shuttle on the district line climbed upwards through a night punctuated by the city's orchestra of lights. It clung dizzily to its thread of rail. Enid closed her eyes and wished she had swallowed an Antivom before they boarded; she was not a good traveller.

"A tubby for your thoughts," her husband said.

"I wasn't thinking, Bruce."

High above outer London, the district shuttle decanted them onto the great curled lip of the Outflank Ring. Their section of the newly built structure was crowded, so that they preserved silence as they whirled towards the non-stop lane that would take them home. But once on the monobus, their silence continued to cling. Neither felt comfortable in the other's lack of speech, fearing unknown thought. Enid spoke first.

"I suppose you are hoping very much that we can learn to talk to these creatures?"

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"The government seems less excited than I had hoped. Of course I know there is this wretched war on . . . Eventually there may be points emerging that prove of more importance than the language factor."

She recognized a vagueness in his phraseology he used when there was something he was unsure of.

"What sort of points?"

He stared into the rushing night.

"The wounded ETA showed a great resistance to dying. When they dissected it on the *Mariestopes*, they cut it almost into chunks before it died. These things have a phenomenal resistance to pain. They don't feel pain. They don't . . . feel pain! Think of it. It's all in the reports, buried in tables and written up technically — I've no patience with it any longer. But one day someone's going to see the importance of those facts."

Again she felt his silence fall like a stone from his lips as he looked past her through the shutlle's tiny window.

"You saw this creature being cut up?"

"Of course I did."

She thought about all the things that men saw and did and bore with apparent ease.

"Can you imagine it?," Ainson said. "Never to feel any pain, physical or mental . . ."

They were sinking down to the local traffic level. His melancholy gaze rested on the darkness that concealed their home.

"What a boon to mankind!" he exclaimed.

After the Ainsons had gone, Sir Mihaly Pasztor stood where he was, in a vacuity that occasionally merged into thought. He began to pace up and down, watched by the eyes of the two alien beings behind the glass. Their glance finally slowed him; he came to rest on the balls of his feet, balancing, swaying gently, regarding them with folded arms, and finally addressing them.

"My dear charges, I understand the problem, and without having met you before, I do to a certain limited extent also understand you. Above all I understand that up until now you have only been faced with a limited type of human mind. I know spacemen, my bag-bellied friends, for I was a spaceman myself. I know how the long dark light-years attract and mould an inflexible mind. You have been faced with men without the human touch, men without finer perceptions, men without the gift of empathy, men who do not readily excuse and understand because they have no knowledge of the diversity of human habits, men who because they have no insight into themselves are denied insight into others.

"In short, my dear and dung-stained charges, if you are civilized, then you need to be confronted by a properly civilized man. If you are more than animal, then it should not be too long before we understand each other. After that will be time for words to grow between us."

One of the ETAs deretracted his limbs, rose, and came over to the glass. Pastzor took it as an omen.

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Going round to the back of the enclosure, he entered a small anteroom to the actual cage. Pressing a button, he activated the part of the floor on which he stood; it moved forward into the cage, carrying before it a low barrier, so that the Director looked rather like a prisoner entering court in a knee-high dock. The mechanism stopped. He and the ETAs were now face to face, although a button by Pasztor's right hand ensured that he could withdraw himself immediately, should danger threaten.

The ETAs made thin whistles and huddled together. Their smell, while far from being as repugnant as might have been expected, was certainly very noticeable. Mihaly wrinkled his nose.

"To our way of thought," he said, "civilization is reckoned as the distance man has placed between himself and his excreta."

One of the ETAs extended a limb and scratched itself.

"We have no civilizations on Earth that are not firmly founded on an alphabet. Even the aborigine sketches his fears and hopes on the rocks. But do you have fears and hopes?"

The limb, having scratched, retracted, leaving the palm of the hand merely as a six pointed pattern in the flesh.

"It is impossible to imagine a creature larger than a flea without fears and hopes, or some such equivalent structure based on pain stimuli. Good feelings and bad feelings: they get us through life, they are our experiences of the external world. Yet if I understand the report on the autopsy of one of your late friends, you experience no pain. How radically that must modify your experience of the world."

One of the lizard creatures became visible. It scuttled along its host's back and applied its little twinkling nose to a fold of skin. It became motionless, and all but invisible.

"And indeed, what is the external world? Since we can only know it through our senses, we can never know it undiluted; we can only know it as external-world-plus-senses. What is a street? To a small boy, a whole world of mystery. To a military strategist, a series of strong points and exposed positions; to a lover, his beloved's dwelling place; to a prostitute, her place of business; to an urban historian, a series of watermarks in time; to an architect, a treaty drawn between art and necessity; to a painter, an adventure in perspective and tone; to a traveller, the location of drink and a warm bed; to the oldest inhabitant, a monument to his past follies, hopes, and hearts; to the motorist —

"How then do our external worlds, yours and mine, my enigmatic kine, clash or chime? Are we not going to find that somewhat difficult to discover until we have succeeded in speaking to each other beyond a list of nouns and needs? Or do you, with our Master Explorer, prefer the proposition reversed: do we have to grasp the nature of at least your external environment before we can parley?

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"And have I not suddenly deviated into sense, sows? For might it not be that you two forlorn creatures are merely hostages to the larger question? Perhaps we shall never communicate with either of the pair of you. But you are a sign that somewhere — perhaps not too many light-years from Clementina— is a planet full of your kind. If we went *there*, if we caught you in your natural haunts, then we would understand so much more about you, would see far more precisely what we should be trying to parley about. We not only need linguists here; we need a couple of starships searching the worlds near Clementina. I must make the point to Lattimore."

The ETAs did nothing.

"I warn you, man is a very persistent creature. If the external world won't come to him, he will go to the external world. If you have vocabularies to shed, prepare to shed them now."

Their eyes had closed.

"Have you lapsed into unconsciousness or prayer? The latter would be wiser, now that you are in the hands of man."

VII

Head Keeper was a sparse gray man who had recently taken to brushing his hair so that it showed under each side of his peaked cap. He had worked under Pasztor long ago — many moons before he had had trouble in walking downstairs in the morning — far below the icy cliffs of the Ross Ice Shelf. His name, as it happened, was Ross, Ian Edward Tinghe Ross, and he gave Bruce Ainson a smart salute as the explorer came up.

"Morning, Ross. How's everything this morning? I'm late."

"Big conference this morning, sir. They've only just started. Sir Mihaly is in there, of course, and the three linguists — Dr. Bodley Temple and his two associates — and a statistician, I forget his name, little man with a warty neck, you can't miss him, and a lady — a scientist, I believe — and that Oxford philosopher again, Roger Wittgenbacher, and our American friend Lattimore, and the novelist, Gerald Bone, and who else?"

"Good lord, that makes about a dozen! What's Gerald Bone doing here?"

"He's a friend of Sir Mihaly's, as I understand it, sir. I thought he looked a very nice man. My own reading tastes are on the more serious side, and so I don't often read any novels, but now and again when I haven't been well — particularly when I had that spot of bronchitis last winter, if you remember — I have dipped into one or two better novels, and I must say that I was very impressed by Mr. Bone's *Many Are the Few*. The hero had had a nervous breakdown —"

"Yes, I do recall the plot, Ross, thank you. And how are our two ETAs?"

"Quite honestly, sir, I reckon they're dying of boredom, and who's to blame them!"

When Ainson entered the study room that lay behind the ETAs' cage, it was to find the conference

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in session. Counting heads as they nodded to him in recognition, he amassed a total of fourteen males and one female. Although they were unalike in appearance, there was a feeling of something shared about them: perhaps an air of authority.

This air was most noticeable about Mrs. Warhoon, if only because she was on her feet and in full spate when Ainson arrived. Mrs. Hilary Warhoon was the lady Head Keeper Ross had referred to. Though only in her mid-forties, she was well-known as a leading cosmoclectic, the new philosophico-scientific profession that attempted to sort the wheat from the chaff in the rapidly accumulating pile of facts and theories which represented Earth's main import from space. Ainson looked at her with approval. To think she should be married to some dried old stick of a banker she could not tolerate! She was a fine figure of a woman, fashionable enough to be wearing one of the new chandelier style suits with pendants at bust, hip, and thigh level; the appeal of her face, serious though her prevalent expression might be, was not purely intellectual; while Ainson knew for a fact that she could out-argue even old Wittgenbacher, Oxford's professional philosopher and technivision pundit. In fact, Ainson could not help comparing her with his wife, to Enid's disadvantage. One of course would never dream of indicating one's inner feelings to her, poor thing, or to anyone else, but really Enid was a poor specimen; she should have married a shopkeeper.

"...feel that we have made progress this week, despite several handicaps inherent in the situation, most of them stemming — as I think the Director was the first to point out — from the fact that we have no background to the lifeform to use as a point of reference." Mrs. Warhoon's voice was pleasantly staccato. It scattered Ainson's thoughts and made him concentrate on what she was saying; if Enid had been a bit more prompt with the breakfast, he might have got here in time to hear the beginning of her speech. "My colleague, Mr. Borroughs, and I have now examined the space vehicle found on Clementina. While we are not qualified to give a technical report on it — you will be getting several technical reports on it from other sources in any case — we both were convinced that it was a vehicle developed for, if not by, the captive lifeform. You will recall that eight of the lifeforms were discovered close to the vehicle; and the body of a dead one was disinterred within the vehicle itself; nine bunks, or niches that by their shape and size are intended to serve as bunks, are observable within the vehicle. Because these bunks run in the direction we think of as vertically rather than horizontally, and are separated by what we now know to be fuel lines, they have not previously been recognized as bunks.

"Here it is appropriate to mention another trouble that we come up against continually. We do not know what is evidence and what is not.

"For instance, we now have to

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ask ourselves, supposing we consider it established that the lifeform has developed space travel: can space travel be regarded as *a priori* proof of superior intelligence?"

"That is the most penetrating question I have heard asked in the last decade," said Wittgenbacher, nodding his head six times with the frightening assurance of a clockwork doll. "If it were posed to the masses, they would give you but one answer, or should I rather say that their many answers would take but one form. They would render an affirmative. We who are here may reckon ourselves more enlightened and would perhaps choose as a more valid example of superior intelligence the works of the analytical philosophers, where logic flows unconfused with emotion. But the masses — and who perhaps amongst us in the final analysis is to gainsay them? — would, if I may employ a colloquialism, lump for a product in which the hands as well as the mind had been employed. I do not doubt that among such a category of products the spaceship would appear to them the most outstanding."

"I'd go along with them," said Lattimore. He sat next to Pasztor, sucking the frame of his spectacles and listening intently.

"I might even accompany them myself," chuckled Wittgenbacher, with more mechanical nods. "But this does raise another question. Suppose that, having granted this lifeform, so unesthetically unhygienic in many of its habits, superior intelligence; suppose we later discover its planet of origin, and then perceive that its — um, its space-going ability is as much governed by instinctual behavior as is the ocean-going ability of our northern fur-seals. Perhaps you will correct me if I am in error, Sir Mihaly, but I believe that the Arctocephalus ursinus, the bear seal, makes a winter migration of many thousands of miles from the Bering Sea down to the shores of Mexico, where I have seen them myself when swimming in the Gulf of California.

"If we find this to be so, then not only shall we be in error in presuming superior intelligence in our friends, but we shall have to ask ourselves this: is it not possible that our own space travel is equally the outcome of instinctual behavior? And — much as the fur-seal may imagine on his swim south that his travel is prompted by his own will — may we not be pushed by an unglimpsed purpose beyond our own?"

Three reporters at the back of the room scribed busily, ensuring that tomorrow's *Times* would have a headline reading:

SPACE TRAVEL:
MAN'S MIGRATORY PATTERN?

Gerald Bone stood up. The novelist's face had lit at the new thought like a child's at sight of a new toy.

"Do I understand you, Professor Wittgenbacher, to imply that we — that our much vaunted intelligence, the one thing that most clearly distinguishes us from the animals, may really be no more than a blind compulsion?"

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"Why not? For all our pretensions to the arts and the humanities, our race ever since the Renaissance at least has directed its main efforts towards the twin goals of expanding its numbers and expanding outwards." Having got the bit between his teeth, the old philosopher was not going to stop there. "In fact, you may liken our leaders to the queen bee who prepares her hive to swarm and does not know why she does it. We swarm into space and do not know why we do it. Something drives —"

But he was not going to get away with it. Lattimore was the first to vent a hearty "Nonsense," and Dr. Bodley Temple and his assistants made unsavory noises of dissent. All round the room, the professor was given the cultural catcall.

"Preposterous theory —"

"Economic possibilities inherent in —"

"Even a techni audience would hardly —"

"I suppose the colonization of other planets —"

"One just cannot dismiss the disciplines of science —"

"Order, please," called the Director.

In the following lull, Gerald Bone called another question to Wittgenbacher, "Then where shall we find true intellect?"

"Perhaps when we run up against our gods," Wittgenbacher replied, not at all put out by the heated atmosphere about him.

"We will have the linguistic report now," Pasztor said sharply, and Dr. Bodley Temple rose, rested his right leg on the chair in front of him, rested his right elbow on his knee, so that he leaned forward with an appearance of eagerness, and did not budge from the position until he finished talking. He was a small stocky man with a screw of gray hair rising from the middle of his forehead and a pugnacious expression. He had the reputation of being a sound and imaginative scholar, and offset it with some of the nattiest waistcoats in London University. His present one, negotiating a considerable stretch of abdomen, was of antique brocade with a pattern of Purple Emperor butterflies chasing themselves about the buttons.

"You all know what the job of my team is," he said, in a voice that Arnold Bennett would have recognized a century back as having sprung from the Five Towns. "We're trying to learn the alien tongue without knowing if they have one, because that's the only way there is to find out. We have made some progress, as my colleague Wilfred Brebner here will demonstrate in a moment.

"First I'll make a few general remarks. These fat chaps from Clementina don't understand what writing is. They have no script. That doesn't mean anything with regard to their language — many African Negro languages were only reduced to writing by white missionaries. Efik and Yoruba were two such languages of the Sudanic language group; almost unused languages now, I'd say.

"I tell you all this, my friends,

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because until I get a better idea, I'm treating these aliens as a couple of Africans. It may bring results. It's more positive than treating them as animals — you may recall that the first white explorers in Africa thought the Negroes were gorillas — and it ensures that if we find they do have a language, then we won't make the mistake of expecting it to follow anything like a Romance pattern.

"I am certain that our fat friends have a language — and you gents of the Press can quote me there, if you like. You've only got to listen to them snorting together. And it isn't all snorts. We've now analyzed it from tapes and have sorted out five hundred different sounds. Though it may be that many of these sounds are the same sound delivered at a different pitch. You may know that there are terrestrial linguistic systems such as — er, Siamese and Cantonese which employ six acoustic pitches. And we can expect maybe more pitches with these fellows, who obviously range very freely over the sound spectrum.

"The human ear is deaf to vibrations of frequency greater than somewhere about 24,000 a second. We have found that these chaps can go twice that, just as a terrestrial bat or a Rungstedian cat can. So one problem is that if we are to converse with them, we must get them to stay within our wavelength. For all we know, that may mean they would have to invent a sort of pidgin language that we could understand."

"I protest," said the statistician, who until now had been content to do little but run his tongue round his teeth. "You are now implying, surely, that we are inferior to them."

"I'm saying nothing of the kind. I'm saying that their range of sound is very much greater than ours. Now Mr. Brebner here is going to give us a few of the phonemes that we have provisionally identified."

Mr. Brebner rose and stood swaying beside the stocky figure of Bodley Temple. He was in his mid-twenties, a slight figure with pale yellow hair, wearing a light gray suit with the hood down. His face was suffused a delicate flame color with the embarrassment of confronting his audience, but he spoke up well.

"The dissections on the dead aliens have told us quite a lot about their anatomy," he said. "If you have read the rather lengthy report, you will know that our friends have three distinct classes of apertures through which they produce their characteristic noises. All these noises appear to contribute to their language, or we assume they do, just as we assume they have a language.

"First, they have in one of their heads a mouth, to which is linked a scent organ. Although this mouth is used for breathing, its main function is feeding and making what we term the oral sounds.

"Secondly, our friends have six breathing vents, three on either side of their body, and situated above their six limbs. At present we refer to these as the nostrils. They are labiate apertures and although un-

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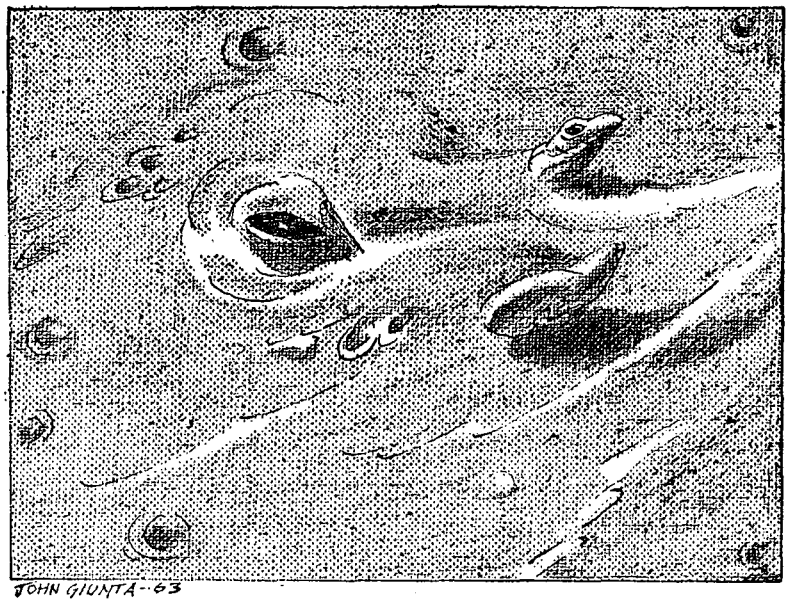

connected to any vocal chords — as is the mouth — these nostrils produce a wide range of sounds.

"Thirdly, our friends also produce a variety of controlled sound through the rectum situated in their second head.

"Their form of speech consists of sound transmitted through all these apertures, either in turn, or any two together, or all three classes together, or all eight apertures together. You will see then that the few sounds I am now going to give you as examples are limited to the less complex ones. Tape recordings of the whole range are of course available, but are not in a very manageable form as yet.

"The first word is *nnnnorrrr-INK*."

To pronounce this word, Wilfred Brebner ran a light snore over the front of his throat and chased it with the little squeak represented here as "ink."

"*Nnnorrr-INK* is the word we have obtained several times in various contexts. Dr. Bodley Temple recorded it first last Saturday, when he brought our friends a fresh cabbage. We obtained it a second time on Saturday when I took out a packet of chewing plastic and gave pieces to Dr. Temple and to Mike. We did not hear it again till Tuesday afternoon, when it was pronounced in a situation when food was not present. Chief Keeper Ross had entered the cage where we were to see if we needed anything, and both creatures made the sound at the same time. We then noted that the word might have a negative connotation, since they had refused the

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cabbage, had not been offered the chew — which they would presume to be food — and might be regarded not to like Ross, who disturbs them when he cleans out their cage. Yesterday, however, Ross brought them a bucket of river mud, which they like, and then we recorded *nnnnorrrr-INK* again, several times in five minutes. So we think at present that it refers to some variety of human activity: appearing bearing something, shall we say. The meaning will be fined down considerably as we go along. From this example you can see the process of elimination we go through with every sound.

"The bucket of river mud also brought forth another word we can recognize. This sounds like WHIP-*bwut-bwip* (a small whistle followed by two pouting labials). We have also heard it when grapefruit has been accepted, when porridge with sliced banana in — a dish over which they show some enthusiasm — has been accepted, and when Mike and I have been leaving in the evening. We take it therefore to be a sign of approval.

"We also think we have a sign of disapproval, although we have only heard it twice. Once it was accompanied by a gesture of disapproval, when an under-keeper caught one of our friends on the snout with a jet of water from a hose. On the other occasion, we had offered them fish, some cooked, some raw. As you are aware, they seem to be vegetarians. The sound — "

Brebner glanced apologetically at Mrs. Warhoon as he blew a series of damp eructations with his mouth, culminating in an open mouthed groan.

"Bbbp - bbbp - bbbp - bbbp - aaaah."

"It certainly sounds like disapproval," Temple said.

Before the ripple of amusement died, one of the reporters said, "Dr. Temple, is this all you have to offer in the way of progress?"

"You have been given a rough guide to what we are doing."

"But you don't seem to have a single one of their words definitely. Why couldn't you tackle what any layman would think would be the first steps, like getting them to count, and to name parts of their bodies and yours? Then at least you have something to begin on, rather than a few abstracts like 'Appearing carrying something.' "

Temple looked down at the Purple Emperors on his waistcoat, munched his lips, and then said, "Young man, a layman might indeed think those were the first steps. But my answer to that layman and to you is that such a catalogue is only possible if the enemy — the alien is prepared to open up a conversation. These two fellows have no interest in communicating with us."

"Why don't you get a computer on the job?"

"Your questions grow more foolish. You need common sense on a job like this. What damned good would a computer be? It can't think, nor can it differentiate between two almost identical phonemes for us. All

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we need is time. You can't imagine — nor can your hypothetical layman — the difficulties that beset us, mainly because we are having to think in a realm where man has not had to think before. Ask yourself this: what *is* language? And the answer is, human speech. Therefore we aren't just doing research, we are inventing something new: non-human speech."

The reporter nodded glumly, Dr. Temple huffed and puffed and sat down, Lattimore rose. He perched his spectacles on the end of his nose and clasped his hands behind his back.

"As you know, Doctor, I'm new around here, so I hope you'll appreciate I ask my questions in all innocence. My position is this. I'm a skeptic. I know that we have investigated only three hundred planets in this universe, and I know that leaves a tidy few million to go, but I still hold that three hundred is a fair sampling. None of them have yielded any form of life half as intelligent as my Siamese cat. This suggests to me that man is unique in the universe."

"It should be no stronger than a suggestion," Temple said.

"Nor is it. Now, I don't give a row of pins if there is no other form of intelligent life in the universe; man has always been on his own, and that won't worry him. On the other hand, if some other intelligent form of human turns up elsewhere, then I'll welcome it as readily as the next man — provided it behaves itself.

"What sticks in my gullet is when someone brings back this couple of overgrown pigs that wallow in their own filth in a way no self-respecting Earth pig would do and insists that we try and prove that they are intelligent people! It's just crazy. You yourself said that these hogs show no interest in trying to communicate with us. Very well, then, isn't that a sign that they have no intelligence? Who in all this room can honestly say they would want these hogs in their own house?"

Uproar broke out again. Everyone turned and argued, not merely with Lattimore, but with each other. Finally it was Mrs. Warhoon's voice rode over the rumpus.

"I have a great deal of sympathy with your position, Mr. Lattimore, and I am very glad you have consented to come down and sit in on our meeting. But the brief answer to you is that, as life takes a multitude of differing forms, so we should expect intelligence to take differing forms. We cannot conceive a differing form of intelligence. We only know that it would widen the boundaries of our thought and understanding in a way that nothing else could. Therefore, when we think we have found such intelligence, we must make sure, even if the effort takes us years."

"That is part of my point, madam," Lattimore said. "If intelligence were there, it would not take us years to detect. We should recognize it right away, even if it came disguised as a turnip."

"How do you account for the spaceship on Clementina?" Gerald Bone asked.

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"I don't have to account for it! These big hogs should be able to account for it. If they built it, then why don't they draw pictures of it when they're given pencils and paper?"

"Because they travel in it doesn't mean to say they built it."

"Can you imagine the lowest dumbest rating on an Earth cruiser getting captured by aliens and then being unable to draw a picture of his ship when they brought him pencil and paper?"

Brebner asked, "And their language, how do you account for that?"

"I enjoyed your animal imitations, Mr. Brebner," Lattimore said good-humoredly. "But frankly I converse more readily with my cat than you do with those two hogs."

Ainson spoke for the first time. He spoke sharply, annoyed that a mere interloper should be belittling his discovery.

"This is all very well, Mr. Lattimore, but you are dismissing too much too easily. We know the ETAs have certain habits that are unpleasant by our standards. But they don't behave together like animals; they provide companionship for each other. They converse. And the spaceship is there, whatever you may say."

"Maybe the spaceship is there. But what is the connection between the hogs and it? We don't know. They may well be just the livestock that the real space travellers took along for food. I don't know; but you don't know either, and you are avoiding the obvious explanation. Frankly, if I were in charge of this operation, I'd pass a hefty vote of censure on the captain of the *Mariestopes* and more particularly on his Master Explorer for carrying out such a sloppy piece of investigation on the spot."

At this, there was a sort of ominous and uneasy groundswell about the room. Only the reporters began to look a little happier. Sir Mihaly leant forward and explained to Lattimore who Ainson was. Lattimore pulled a long face.

"Mr. Explorer Ainson, I fear I owe you an apology for having failed to recognize you. If you'd been here before the meeting began, we could have been introduced."

"Unfortunately this morning my wife —"

"But I must absolutely stick to what I said. The report on what happened on Clementina is pathetic in its amateurishness. Your stipulated week's reconnoiter of the planet was expired when you found these animals beside the spaceship, and rather than depart from schedule you just shot up the majority of them, took a few technishots of the scene and blasted off. This ship, for all you know, may have been the equivalent of a cattle truck, with the cattle out to wallow, while two miles away in another valley was the real ship, with real bipeds like us, people — just like Mrs. Warhoon says — that we'd give our eyes and eye teeth to communicate with, and vice versa, you can be sure.

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"No, I'm sorry, Mr. Ainson, but your committees here are more bogged down than they care to admit, simply because of bad field work on your part."

Ainson had grown very red. Something ghastly had happened in the room. The feeling had gone against him. Everyone — he knew it without looking at them — everyone was sitting in silent approval of what Lattimore said.

"Any idiot can be wise after the event," he said. "You seem to fail to realize how unprecedented it all was. I—"

"I do realize how unprecedented it all was. I'm saying that it was unprecedented, and that therefore you should have been more thorough. Believe me, Mr. Ainson, I've read photostats of the report on the expedition and I've scrutinized the photographs that were taken, and I have the impression that the whole thing was conducted more like a big game hunt than an official expedition paid for with public money."

"I was not responsible for the shoot of the six ETAs. A patrol ran into them, coming back to the ship late. It went to investigate the aliens, they attacked and were shot in self-defense. You should re-read the reports."

"These hogs show no sign of being vicious. I don't believe that they attacked the patrol. I think they were trying to run away."

Ainson looked about for help.

"I appeal to you, Mrs. Warhoon, is it reasonable to try and guess how these aliens behaved in their free state from a glance at their apathetic behavior in captivity?"

Mrs. Warhoon had formed an immediate admiration for Bryant Lattimore; she liked a strong man.

"What other means have we for judging their behavior?" she asked.

"You have the reports, that's what. There is a full account there for you to study."

Lattimore returned to the attack.

"What we have in the reports, Mr. Ainson, is a summary of what the leader of the patrol told you. Is he a reliable man?"

"Reliable? Yes, he is reliable enough. There is a war on in this country, you know, Mr. Lattimore, and we can't always choose the men we want."

"I see. And what was this man's name?"

And indeed what was his name? Young, beefy, rather sullen. Not a bad fellow. Horton? Halter? In a calmer atmosphere he would remember at once. Controlling his voice, Ainson said, "You will find his name in the written report."

"All right, all right, Mr. Ainson. Obviously you have your answers. What I'm saying is that you should have returned with a lot more answers. You see you are something of a key man here, aren't you? You're the Master Explorer. You were trained up to just this situation. I'd say you have made it very difficult for all of us by producing inadequate or even conflicting data."

Lattimore sat down, leaving Ainson standing.

"The nature of the data is to be conflicting," Ainson said. "Your job

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is to make sense of it, not to reject it. Nobody is to blame. If you have any complaints, then they must be forwarded to Captain Bargerone. Captain Bargerone was in charge of the whole thing, not I. Oh, and Quilter was the name of the fellow in charge of the patrol. I've just remembered."

Mihaly came to his rescue then, and called for the next report, but it was obvious that a vote of no confidence had been passed on Master Explorer Ainson.

VIII

The sun, as its inalienable custom was, went to bed at sunset. At the same time, Sir Mihaly Pasztor put on a dinner jacket and went to meet the guest he had invited to dine at his flat.

This was a month after the dismal meeting at the zoo.

Since then, the situation could not be said to have improved. The fact was, there was no progress being made. There was no progress being made chiefly because the aliens, imprisoned in their hygienic cell, showed no interest in the humans, nor any wish to co-operate in any of the stunts the humans devised. This disobliging attitude had its effect on the research team trying to deal with them; their increasing moroseness became increasingly punctuated with bouts of self-pitying oration, as if, like a communist millionaire, they felt impelled to explain a position of some delicacy.

The general public, too, reacted adversely to the alien cold shoulder. The intelligent man in the street could have appreciated an intelligent alien, no matter what his shape, as a new distraction to compete with the world series, the grim news from Charon, where Brazil seemed to be winning the war, or the leaping taxes that were a natural concomitant to both war and TP travel. Gradually the queues that stood all day to see the aliens in the afternoon dwindled away (after all, they didn't move about much, and they looked not so very different from terrestrial hippos, and you weren't allowed to throw nuts at them in case it turned out they really lived in skyscrapers back home) and went back to their old routine of watching instead the Pinfold III primaritals, which indulged in a form of group intercourse every hour.

Pasztor was, as it happened, thinking of intercourse as he ushered his guest, Mrs. Hilary Warhoon, into his modest dining closet; or if not thinking of it, reviewing with a whimsical smile at his own weaknesses the fantasies with which he had indulged himself half an hour before Mrs. Warhoon's arrival. But no, she was not quite enchanting enough, and Mr. Warhoon by repute was too powerful and spiteful, and anyhow Sir Mihaly no longer had the zest necessary to carry off one of those illicit affairs — even though "illicit" was one of the more alluring words in the English language.

She sat down at the table and sighed.

"It's wonderful to relax. I've had a vile day."

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"Busy?"

"I've made work. But I've accomplished nothing. And I'm oppressed by a sense of failure."

"You, Hilary? You are far from being a failure."

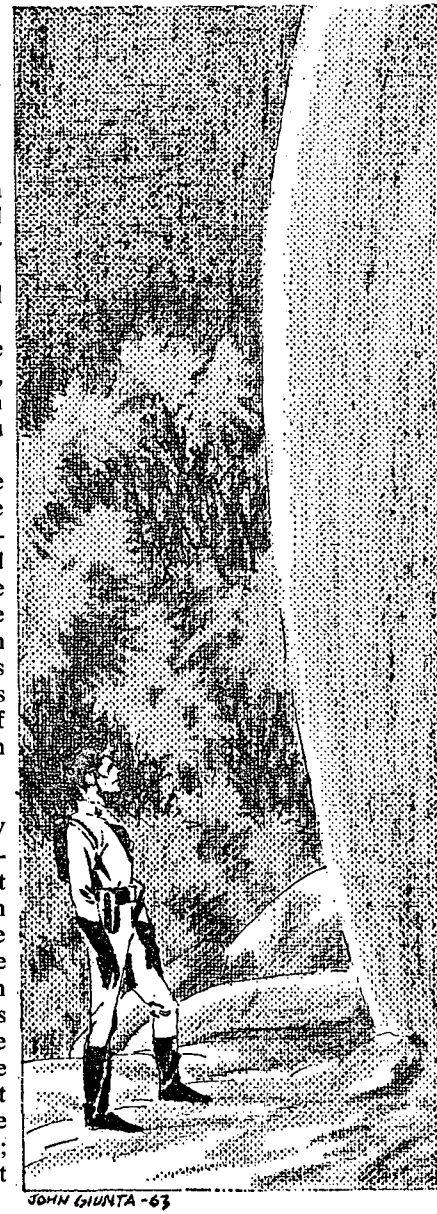
"I was thinking of it less in a personal than in a general or racial sense. Do you want me to elaborate? I'd like to elaborate."

He held up his hands in playful protest.

"My idea of civilized intercourse is not to repress but to bring forth, to elaborate. I have never been other than interested in what you have to say."

There were three globular table ovens standing on the table. As she began to speak, he opened the refrigerated drawers on his right and began to put their contents into the ovens to cook: Fera de Travers, the salmon of Lake Geneva, to begin with, to be followed by eland steaks flown that morning from the farms of Kenya, with, to add a touch of the exotic, fingerlips, the Venusian asparagus.

"When I say I'm oppressed by a general failure," Mrs. Warhoon said, "I'm fully aware that it sounds rather pretentious. 'Who am I among so many?', as Shaw once said in a different context. It's the old problem of definitions, with which the aliens have confronted us in dramatic new guise. Perhaps we cannot converse with them until we have decided for ourselves what constitutes civilization. Don't raise that suave eyebrow at me, Mihaly; I know civilization does not consist



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of lying indolent in one's own droppings — though it's possible that if we had a guru here he would tell us it did.

"When you take any one quality by which we measure civilization, you will find it missing from various cultures. Take the whole question of crime. For over a century, we have recognized crime as a symptom of sickness or unhappiness. Once we recognized that in practice as well as theory, crime statistics dropped dramatically for the first time. But in many periods of high civilization, life imprisonment was customary, heads fell like petals. Certainly kindness or understanding or mercy are not signs of civilization, any more than war and murder are signs of the lack of it.

"As for the arts that we rightly cherish, they were all practised by prehistoric man."

"This argument is familiar to me from my undergraduate days," Sir Mihaly said, as he served the salmon. "Yet still we cook our food and eat according to rules with carefully wrought utensils." He poured some wine. "Still we choose our vintages and exercise our judgments and our prejudices over that choice." He offered her a basket full of warm crisp rolls. "Still we sit together, male and female, and merely converse."

"I'm not denying, Mihaly, that you keep a good table, or that you have failed as yet to throw me on the floor. But this meal — and I cast no aspersions — is the end product of a number of factors that have only a nodding acquaintance with true civility. I mean the fishers crouching in their boats, the farmers sweating through their grazing land, the barb in the mouth, the shot in the head, the chains of middlemen less tolerable than farmers or fishers, the organizations that prepare or can or pack, the transport firms, the financiers — Mihaly, you're laughing at me!"

"Ah, you're talking of all this organization with such disapproval. I approve. Vive l'organization! Last century, as you say, they didn't approve of prisons, but they had them nevertheless; this century we have become organized, and we don't have prisons. Last century, indeed, didn't approve of war, yet it had three bouncing big ones, in 1914, in 1939, and in 1969; this century we have become organized, and we hold our wars on Charon, the furthest planet, out of harm's way. If that's not civilization, I accept it readily as a substitute. How will you have your steak, Hilary?"

"Rare, please. All I'm trying to say is that our civilization may be built not on our best, but on our worst."

He pressed the spin stud in the oven pedestal. The porcelain and glass hemisphere slid into the bronze hemisphere. He retrieved the steaks. The aliens again! Ah, but Mrs. Warhoon was off form tonight! The platemaker coughed out two warm plates, and he served her moodily and said:

"I received a long letter from Lattimore yesterday morning, which was partly why I invited you here this evening. The Americans, as you

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know, are very interested in our ETAs. We have had a constant stream of them to the Exozoo over the last month. They are convinced, and I am sure Lattimore has convinced them, that things are not being run as efficiently as they might be. Lattimore wrote to say that their new stellar exploration ship, *Gansas,* has been re-routed, though the re-routing is not official yet. Its investigation of the Crab Nebula is postponed. Instead, it will be heading for Clementina, to search for the home planet of the ETAs."

Mrs. Warhoon put her knife and fork together, raised her eyebrows, and said, "What?"

"Lattimore will be on the flight in an advisory capacity. His meeting with you much impressed him and he earnestly hopes that you will come along on the flight as chief cosmeclectic. He asked me to put in a good word for him before he gets in touch with you direct."

Mrs. Warhoon let her shoulders sag and leaned forward between the Scandinavian candleabras. "Goodness," she said. Her cheeks became red; in the candlelight she looked thirty again.

"He says you will not be the only woman on the flight. He also gives a rough indication of the salary, which will be fabulous. You ought to go, Hilary. It's a splendid opportunity."

She put an elbow on the table and rested her forehead on her hand. He thought it a theatrical gesture, even while seeing that she was genuinely moved and excited. His earlier fantasies returned to him.

"Space! You know I've been no further abroad than Venus. You know it would wreck my marriage, Mihaly. Alfred would never forgive me."

"I'm sorry. I understood your marriage was a marriage in name only."

Her eyes rested blankly on a framed infra-red photograph of Conquest Canyon, Pluto. She drained her wine glass.

"It doesn't matter. I can't — or possibly will not — save it. To leave in the *Gansas* would make a clean break with the past... Thank goodness that in that sphere at least we are more civilized than our grandparents, and have no involved divorce laws. Should I go on the *Gansas,* Mihaly? I should, shouldn't I? You know there are few men I would as readily take advice from as you."

The curve of her wrist, the uncertain glimmer of candlelight in her hair had helped him to make up his mind. He rose, went round the table, and placed his hands on her bare shoulders.

"You owe it to yourself, Hilary. You know it is not only a golden professional opportunity; these days, we are not adult humans until we have faced ourselves in deep space."

When she was gone, Sir Mihaly walked aimlessly about his flat. He settled enough once to sweep cutlery and dishes from the table into the disposer, watching soft

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flame rise as they disintegrated; then he resumed his pacing.

The woman had a germ of truth, though he called it sickness. Wasn't truth a sickness that men spent lifetimes searching for, just as a dog seeks the coarse grass that makes him vomit? What was that epigram he had trotted forth too often, that civilization was the distance man had placed between himself and his excreta? But nearer the facts was the dictum that civilization was the distance man had placed between himself and everything else, including other men; cradled deep in the conception of it was the notion of privacy. Once away from the need of the rough and tumble of a camp fire, shut in a safe room of his own, meditation arose from mere abstraction, individual art arose from folk art, love was born from sex... Enough. Culture was a barrier.

Inside the double frontiers of his culture and his skull, could man afford to face other kinds of cultures?

It was what might be called a Good Question, Pasztor thought.

He took the lift down to the ground floor. The exozoo was dark about him, only the simultaneously high and deep chuckle of a stonecracker in the High-G House sending a shiver through the silence. Man, shut in his culture, so anxious to imprison other animals with him...

The two ETAs were seemingly asleep as he entered and the pallid lights came on. One of the lizard creatures took a flying leap back into the arm socket of its protector, but the big bulk did not stir.

Pasztor moved through the side door and so came into the back of the cage. He unlocked the low barrier and walked up to the ETAs. They opened their eyes with what looked like infinite weariness.

"Don't worry, fellows. I'm sorry to trouble you, but a certain lady who has your interests at heart has given me, all unwittingly, a new line of approach. Look, fellows, I'm trying to be friendly, see. I do want to reach across, if it can be done."

Removing his trousers, squatting close to them, speaking gently, the director of the exozoo defecated onto the plastic floor.

IX

"How far-seeing you were to christen this world Grudgrodd, Cosmopolitan," the third politan said.

"I've explained several times my reasons for thinking that we cannot any longer be on Grudgrodd," said the Sacred Cosmopolitan, as the two utods lay comfortably together.

"And I still say that I don't believe metal could be made strong enough to withstand launching into the star-realms. Don't forget I took a course in metalfacture when I was a priestling. Besides, the metal thing wasn't the right shape for a spaceship. I know it doesn't do to be too dogmatic, but there are some points on which one has to make a stand: though I do it with regards to your cosmopolity only with apologies."

"Say what you may, I have the feeling in my bones that the Triple

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Suns no longer shine on these skies — not that these thin life forms ever permit us to see the skies."

As he spoke, the Sacred Cosmopolitan swiveled one of his heads to watch the thin life form performing his natural function a few feet distant. He thought he recognized this thin life form as one of those whose habits did not arouse disgust; certainly he was not the one who came with an attachment that spurted a jet of cold water. Nor did he seem to be one of those who sat about with machines and two assistants (no doubt they were this world's equivalents of the priesthood) so palpably trying to seduce him and the third politan into communication.

The thin life form stood up and assembled the cloth over the lower part of his body.

"That is very interesting!" the politan exclaimed. "It confirms what we were saying a couple of days ago."

"In most particulars, yes. As we thought, they have two heads as we do, but one is used for dunging and one for speaking."

"What seems so laughable is that they have a pair of legs sticking out of their lower head. Yes, perhaps after all you are right, father-mother; despite all logic, perhaps we really are spirited far away from the Triple Suns, for it is difficult to imagine any of this sort of horrid absurdity on the planets under their sway. Why do you think he came to perform a dung ritual here?"

The cosmopolitan twiddled one of his fingers, baffled.

"He can hardly regard this as a sacred seeding spot. It may be that he performed merely to let us see that we were not the only ones possessing fertility; or on the other hand, it may have been merely from curiosity, in order to see what we did. Here's a case again, I think, where for the time being we must admit that the thinlegs' ways of thought are too alien for us to interpret, and that any tentative explanation we may offer is bound to be utodomorphic. And while we're on the subject... I don't want to alarm you in any way... no, as Cosmopolitan, I must keep these things to myself."

"Please — since there have been only the two of us, you have told me many things from the rich store of your mind that you would not otherwise have told me. Snort on, I beg you."

The alien life form was standing nearby, watching. He was unable to maintain stillness for any length of time. Ignoring him, the cosmopolitan began to speak cautiously, for he knew on what dangerous ground he trod. When one of his grorgs began to crawl under his belly, he slapped it back into position with a firmness that surprised even himself.

"I don't want you to be alarmed at what I am about to say, son, though I am aware that I may seem at first to strike at the very foundation of our beliefs. You remember that moment when the thin legs came to us in the dark, when we were in the midden by the side of star-realm ark?"

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"Though it seems a long while ago, I do not forget it."

"The thinlegs came to us then and immediately translated the others into their carrion stage."

"I remember. I was startled at first. I crept close to you."

"And then?"

"When they were taking us in their wheeled truck to the tall metal thing you say may have been a star-realm-ark, I was so overcome with shame that I had not been chosen to move further along the utodammp cycle that I hardly could bear it. In took in not other impressions."

The thinlegs was making signals with the mouth of his upper head, but they moved onto a higher audibility band, as was appropriate when discussing personal aspects, and ignored him from then on.

The Sacred Cosmopolitan continued, "My son, I find this difficult to say, since our language naturally does not hold the appropriate concepts, but these life forms may be as alien in thought as they are in shape: not just in their upper thoughts, but in their whole psychological constitution. For a long while I felt as you did, a sort of shame that our six companions had been chosen for translation while we hadn't. But . . . supposing, Blug Lugug, that these life forms did not exercise choice. Suppose they translated us at random."

"Random? I'm surprised to hear you use such a vulgar word, Cosmopolitan. The fall of a leaf or the splash of a rain drop may be — er random, but with higher life forms — everything higher than a mud snwitch — the fact that they form part of life cycles prevents anything random."

"That applies to beings on the worlds of the Triple Suns. But these creatures of Grudgrodd, these thinlegs, may be part of another and conflicting pattern."

At this point, the life form left them. As he disappeared, the light faded from their room. Quite uninterested in these minor phenomena, the cosmopolitan continued to grope for words.

"What I am saying is that in some way these creatures may not have helpful intentions for us. There is a word from the Revolution Age that is useful here; these thinlegs may be *bad*. Do you know this word from your studies?"

"It's a sort of sickness, isn't it?" the politan asked, recalling the years when he had wallowed through the mazes of mindsuckle in the epoch of Welcome White.

"Well, a special sort of sickness. I feel that these thinlegs are bad in a more healthy way."

"Is that why you have not wished us to communicate with them?"

"Certainly not. I am no more prepared to converse with strangers bereft of my wallow than they would probably be prepared to converse with me bereft of the body materials that cover them. In the end, when they grasp that rudimentary fact, we may perhaps try to talk to them, though I suspect their brains may be quite as limited as

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their voice range suggests. But we shall certainly get nowhere until they realise we have certain basic requirements. Once they have grasped that, talk may be worth while."

"This . . . this business of *bad*. I'm alarmed you should think like this."

"Son, the more I consider what has happened, the more I am forced to do so."

Blug Lugug, who had been known for a hundred and eighty years as a third politan, lapsed into a troubled silence.

He was recalling more and more about *bad*.

In the Revolution Age, there had been bad. Even though the utods lived up to eleven hundred years, the Revolution Age was over three thousand generations ago; yet its effects still lingered in everyday life on Dapdrof.

At the beginning of that amazing age was born Manna Warun. It was significant that he had been hatched during a particularly cataclysmic entropic solar orbital disestablishment, the very esod, in fact, during which Dapdrof, changing from Saffron Smiler to Yellow Scowler, had lost its little moon, Woback, which now pursued its own eccentric course alone.

Manna Warun had collected disciples and left the traditional wallows and salads of his people. His band had moved to the wastes, there to spend many years refining and developing the ancient and traditional skills of the utods. Some of his group left him; more joined. There they stayed for one hundred and seventy-five years, according to the old priestly histories.

During that time, they created what Manna Warun called "an industrial revolution". They learnt to make many more metals than their contemporaries knew of: hard metals, metals that could stretch thin and convey new forms of power along their lengths. The revolutionaries scorned to walk on their own six feet any more. Now they rode in various sorts of car that boasted a multitude of tumbling feet, or they flew in the air in other cars with wings. So said the old legends, though there was no doubt that they liked to lay it on a bit thick.

But when the revolutionaries came back to their people to try and convert them to new doctrines, one feature of their lives in particular seemed strange. For the revolutionaries preached — and dramatically practiced — what they called "cleanliness".

The mass of the people (if the old reports were to be believed) were well disposed towards most of the proposed innovations. They were particularly pleased with the notion that terms of motherhood might be eased by introducing one or more systems that would abolish mindsuckle; because for most of the fifty years of a utod's childhood a mother was committed to mindsuckling her child on the complicated law and lore that was racial history and habit; and the revolutionaries taught that this function might be handled by a mechanism. But "cleanliness" was something dif-

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ferent altogether — a real revolution.

Cleanliness was a difficult concept to grasp, if only because it attacked the very roots of being. It suggested that the warm mud banks in which the utod had evolved might now be abandoned, that the wallows and middensteads and middens which were effective mud-substitutes be abandoned, that the little parasite-devouring grorgs which were the traditional utodian companions be also abandoned.

Manna and his companions demonstrated that it was possible to live without all this needless luxury ("dirt" was another term they used for it). That cleanliness was evidence of progress. That in the modern revolutionary age, mud was *bad*.

In this way, the revolutionaries had turned necessity into virtue. Working in the wastes, far away from the wallows and their sheltering ammps, mud and liquid had been scarce. In that austerity had been born their austere creed.

They went further. Once he had started, Manna Warun developed his theme, and attacked the established beliefs of the utods. In this he was aided by his chief disciple, Creezeazs. Creezeazs denied that the spirits of utods were born into their infant bodies from the ammps; he denied that a carrion stage followed the corporeal stage. Or rather, he could not gainsay that the bodily elements of the corporal stage were absorbed into the mud and so drawn up again into the ammps, but he claimed that there was no similar transference for a spirit. He had no proof of this. It was just an emotional statement obviously aimed at getting the utod away from their natural habit; yet he found those who believed him.

Strange moral laws, prohibitions, inhibitions, began to grow up among the believers. But it could not be denied that they had power. The cities of the wastes to which they withdrew blazed with light in the dark. They cultivated the lands by strange methods, and drew strange fruit from them. They took to covering their casspu orifices. They changed from male to female at unprecedented rates, indulging themselves without breeding. All this and more they did. Yet it was not noticeable that they were exactly happier — not that they preached happiness, for their talk was more of duty and rights and of what was considered good or bad.

One great thing that the revolutionaries achieved in their cities stirred everyone's imagination.

The utods had many poetic qualities, as their vast fund of tales, epics, songs, chants and werewhispers show. This side of them was touched when the revolutionaries built some of their machinery into an ancient ammp seed and drove it into and far beyond the skies. Manna Warun went in it.

Since prememory days, before mindsuckle had made the races of utod what they were, the ammp seeds had been used for boats with which to sail to less crowded parts of Dapdrof. To sail to less crowded

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worlds had a sort of crazy appropriateness in it. Down in the wallows, the complicated nexi of old families began to feel that perhaps after all cleanliness had something. The fifteen worlds that circled about the six planets of the Home Cluster were all visible at various times to the naked eye, and hence were known and admired. To experience the thrill of visiting them might even be worth renouncing "dirt".

People, converts and perverts, began to trickle into the cities of the wastes.

Then something odd happened.

The word began to get about that Manna Warun was not all he had made himself out to be. It was said that he had often slid away to indulge himself in a secret wallow, for instance. Rumors spread thick and fast, and of course Manna was not there to deny them.

As the ugly rumors grew, people wondered when Creezeazs would step forward and clear his leader's name.

At last, Creezeazs did step forward. Heavily, with tears in his eyes, speaking through his ockpu orifices only, he admitted that the stories circulating were true. Manna was a sinner, a tyrant, a mudbather. He had none of the virtues he demanded from others. In fact, though others — his friend and true disciple Creezeazs in particular — had done all in their power to stop him, Manna had gone to the *bad*.

Now that the sad tale had emerged, there was nothing for it. Manna Warun must go. It was in the public interest. Nobody, of course, would be happy about it; but there was such a thing as duty. People had a right to be protected, otherwise the good would be destroyed with the bad.

Hardly a utod liked all this, although they saw Creezeazs' point of view: Manna must be expelled. When the prophet returned from the stars, there was a reception committee waiting for him on the star-realm ark field.

Before the ark landed, trouble broke out. A young utod, whose shining but alarmingly cracked skin showed him to be a thorough-going Hygienic (as the Corps of the Revolution were currently calling themselves), jumped up onto a box. He deretracted all his limbs and cried in a voice like a steam whistle that Creezeazs had been lying about Manna to serve his own ends. All who followed Creezeazs were traitors.

At this moment, an unprecedented event occurred, even as the star-realm ark floated down from the skies: fighting broke out, and a utod with a sharp metal rod hastened Creezeazs onto the next stage of his utodammp cycle.

"Creezeazs!" gasped the third politan.

"What makes you mention that unfortunate name?" inquired the cosmopolitan.

"I was thinking about the Revolution Age. Creezeazs is the first utod in our history to be propelled along the utodammp cycle without goodwill," Blug Lugug said, coming back to the present.

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"That was a bad time. But perhaps because these thinlegs also seem to enjoy cleanliness, they also hasten people round the cycle without goodwill. As I say, they are bad in a healthy way. And we are their random victims."

Blug Lugug withdrew his limbs as much as possible. He shut his eyes, closed his orifices, and stretched himself until his external appearance was that of an enormous terrestrial sausage. This was his way of expressing priestly alarm.

There was nothing in their situation to warrant the cosmopolitan's extreme language. True, it might become rather dull if they were kept here for any length of time — one needed a change of scenery every five years or so. And it was thoughtless the way the life forms removed the signs of their fertility. But the life forms showed evidence of good will. They supplied food, and soon learned not to bring items that were unwelcome. With time and patience, they might learn other useful things.

On the other hand, there was this question of *bad*. It was indeed possible that the life forms had the same sort of madness that existed in the Revolution Age on Dapdrof. Yet it was absurd to pretend that, however alien they might be, these thinlegs did not have an equivalent evolutionary cycle to the utodammp cycle; and this, being so fundamental, could only be something for which they would have a profound respect — in their own peculiar way, naturally.

And there was this: the Revolution Age was a freak, a mere flash in the pan, lasting only for five hundred years — half a lifespan — out of the hundreds of millions of years of utodammp memory. It would seem rather a tall coincidence if the thinlegs happened to be undergoing the same trouble at this moment.

It was notorious that people who used violent words like *bad* and *random victim,* the very words of madness, were themselves verging on madness. So the Sacred Cosmopolitan . . .

At the very thought, the politan quivered. His fondness for the cosmopolitan was deepened by the fact that the older utod, during one of his female phases, had mothered him. Now he stood in need of consolation by the other members of his wallow.

Clearly it was time they were getting back to Dapdrof.

That implied that they should speak with these aliens and hasten their return. The Cosmopolitan forbade communication — and quite rightly — on a point of etiquette; but it began to look more and more as if something should be done. Perhaps, Blug Lugug thought, he could get one of the aliens on his own and try to convey some sense to it. It shouldn't be difficult. He had memorized every sentence they had spoken in his presence since their arrival in the metal thing; although it made no sense to him, it should be useful somehow.

Pursing one of his ockpu orifices, he said, "Wilfred, you don't happen to have a screwdriver, do you?"

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"What's that?" asked the Cosmopolitan.

"Nothing. Thinlegs talk."

Sinking into a silence that held less cheer than usual, the third politan began to think about the Revolution Age, in case it had any useful parallels with the present case to offer.

With the death of Creezeazs and the return home of Manna Warun, more trouble had begun. This was when *bad* had flourished at its grandest. Quite a number of utods were thrust without good will into the next phase of their cycle. Manna, of course, returned from his flight in the star-realm ark very vexed to find how things had turned against him into the Cities of the Wastes.

He became more extreme than before. His people were to foreswear mud-bathing entirely; instead, water would be supplied to every dwelling. They were to keep their casspu orifices covered. Skin oils were forbidden. Greater industry was required. And so on.

But the seeds of dissatisfaction had been well sown by Creezeazs and his followers, and more bloodshedding ensued. Many people returned to their ancestral wallows, leaving the Cities of the Wastes slowly to fall into ruin while the inhabitants fought each other. Everyone regretted this, since there existed a genuine admiration for Manna which nothing could quench.

In particular, his journey among the stars was widely discussed and praised. Much was known, even at that period, about the neighboring celestial bodies known as the Home Cluster, and particularly about the three suns, Welcome White, Saffron Smiler and Yellow Scowler, around each of which Dapdrof revolved in turn as one esod followed another. These suns, and the other planets in the cluster, were as familiar — and as strange — to the people as the Circumpolar Mountains in Dapdrof's Northern Shunkshukkun.

Whatever woes the Revolution Age had brought, it had brought the chance to investigate these other places. It was a chance the ordinary utod found he wanted.

The Hygienics had control of all star-realm travel. The masses of the unconverted, pilgrimaging from all over the globe to the Cities of the Wastes, found they could partake in the new exploration of other worlds under one of two conditions. They could become converts to the harsh disciplines of Manna Warun, or they could mine the materials needed for building and fuelling the engines of the arks. Most of them preferred to do the latter.

Mining came easily. Had not the utod evolved from little burrowing creatures not unlike the Haprafruf Mud Mole? They dug the ores willingly, and soon the whole process of building star arks became routine, almost as much a folk art as weaving, platting, or blishing. So in turn travel through the star realms took on something of the same informality, particularly when it was discovered that the Triple Suns and their three near neighbors supported seven other worlds on which life

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could be lived almost as enjoyably as on Dapdrof.

Then came a time when life indeed was rather pleasant on some of the other worlds: on Buskey, for instance, and Clabshub, where the utodammp system was quickly established. Meanwhile the Hygienics split into rival sects, those that practiced retraction of all limbs, and those that deplored it as immoral. Finally the three nuclear Wars of Wise Deportment broke out, and the fair face of the home planet underwent a thoroughly unhygienic bombardment, the severity of which — destroying as it did so many miles of carefully tended forest and swamp land — actually changed climatic conditions for a period of about a century.

The resulting upheavals in the weather, followed by a chain of severe winters, concluded the wars in the most radical of ways, by converting into the carrion stage almost all the surviving Hygienics of whatever persuasion. Manna himself disappeared. His end was never known for sure, although legend had it that a particularly fine ammp, growing in the midst of the ruins of the largest of the Cities of the Wastes, represented the next stage of his existence.

Slowly, the old and more reasonable ways returned.

Helped by utods returning from the other planets, the home population re-established itself. Dams were rebuilt, swamps painstakingly restored, middensteads reintroduced on the traditional patterns, ammps replanted everywhere. The Cities of the Wastes were left to fall into decay. Nobody was interested any more in the ethics of cleanliness. Law and ordure were restored.

Yet at whatever expense it had been acquired, the industrial revolution had borne its fruits, and not all of them were permitted to die. The basic techniques necessary for maintaining star realm travel passed to the ancient priesthood dedicated to maintaining the happiness of the people. The priesthood simplified practices already smoothed into quasi-ritual by habit and saw that these techniques were handed on from mother to son by mindsuckle, together with the rest of the racial lore.

All that now lay three thousand generations and almost as many esods ago. Through the disciplines of mindsuckle, its outlines remained clear. In Blug Lugug's brains, the memory of the hideous perverted talk and teachings of Manna and the other Hygienics was vivid. He prided himself on being the filthiest and healthiest of his generation of priests. And he knew by the absurd phrases of moral condemnation the cosmopolitan had uttered that the cleanliness inflicted on his old body by the thinlegs was affecting his brain. It was time something was done.

X

Bruce Ainson paid ten tubbies into the corner sinker and rose to the local traffic level. Abstractedly, he climbed into a moving chair that skied him up to the

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non-stop level and racked itself onto one of the robot monobuses, speeding toward distant London and the quarter where Sir Mihaly Pasztor worked. Ten minutes later, he was stalling impatiently before the Director's secretary.

"I doubt if he can see you this morning, Mr. Ainson, since you have no appointment."

"He has to see me, my dear girl; will you please announce me?"

Pecking doubtfully at the nail of her little finger, the girl disappeared into the inner office. She emerged a minute later, standing aside without speaking to admit Ainson into Mihaly's room. Ainson swept by her without irritation; that was a girl he had always been careful to smile and nod at; her answering show of friendliness had been nothing but pretence.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you when it's obvious you are very busy," he said to the Director. Mihaly did not immediately assure his old friend that it was perfectly all right. He maintained a steady pacing by the window and asked, "What brings you here, Bruce?"

Ainson said, "I should think you might guess what has brought me here. This confounded American ship, the *Gansas*, or whatever it's called, leaves next week to look for the home planet of our ETAs."

"I hope they will have luck."

"Don't you realize the absolute disgrace of it? I have not been invited to join the expedition. Every day I expected a word from them. It hasn't come. Surely there must be a mistake?"

"I think it is impossible there should be a mistake in such a matter, Bruce."

"I see. Then it's a public disgrace."

Mihaly pulled a wry face, cupped an elbow and rubbed his chin.

"Would you care for a drink, Bruce?"

"Certainly not. Why do you always insist on offering me one when you know I don't drink?"

"You must excuse me if I have a little one. It is not normally my habit at this early time of morning." As he went over to a pair of small doors set in the wall, he said, "Perhaps you will feel better, or perhaps worse, if I tell you that you are not alone in your disgrace. Here at the Exozoo we have our disappointments. We have not made the progress in communication with these poor ETAs that we had hoped to do."

"I thought that one of them had suddenly started spouting English?"

"Spouting is right. A series of jumbled phrases with amazingly accurate imitations of the various voices that originally spoke them. I recognized my own voice quite clearly. Of course we have it all on tape. But unfortunately this development did not come soon enough to save the axe from falling. I have received word from the Minister for Extra-Terrestrial Affairs that all research with the ETAs is to close down forthwith."

Unwilling though he was to be diverted from his own concerns, Ainson was startled.

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"They *can't* just close it down! This — we've got here the most important thing that has ever happened in the history of man. They — I don't understand. They can't close it down."

Pasztor poured himself a small whisky and sipped it.

"Unfortunately the Minister's attitude is understandable enough. He gave me a reason which, like it or not, we must accept."

"What was the reason?"

"The war. We are comfortable here, we are apt to forget this crippling war with Brazil that has dragged on for so long. Brazil have captured Square 503, and it looks as if our casualties have been higher than announced. What interests the government at present more than the possibility of talking with the ETAs is the possibility that they do not experience pain. If there is some substance circulating in their arteries that confers complete analgesia, then the government want to know about it. It is obviously a potential war weapon.

"So, the official reasoning goes, we must find out how these beings tick. We must make best use of them."

Ainson rubbed his head. The war! More insanity! It had never entered his mind.

"I knew it would happen! I knew it would! So they are going to cut our two ETAs up," he said. His voice sounded like a creaking door.

"They are going to cut them up in the most refined way. They are going to sink electrodes into their brains, to see if pain can be induced. They will try a little overheating here, a little freezing there. In short, they will try to discover if the ETAs' freedom from pain really exists: and if it exists, whether it is engendered by a natural insensitivity or brought about by an antibody. I have protested against the whole business, but I might as well have kept quiet. I'm as upset as you are."

Ainson clenched a fist and shook it vigorously close to his stomach.

"Lattimore is behind all this. I knew he was my enemy directly I saw him! You should never have let—"

"Oh, don't be foolish, Bruce! Lattimore has nothing whatever to do with it. Can't you see this is the sort of bloody stupid thing that happens whenever something important is involved? It's the people who have the power rather than the people who have the knowledge who get the ultimate say. Sometimes I really think mankind is a bit mad."

"They're all mad. Fancy not begging me to go on the *Gansas*! I discovered these creatures, I know them! The *Gansas* needs me! You must do what you can, Mihaly, for the sake of an old friend."

Grimly, Pasztor shook his head.

"I can do nothing for you. I have explained why I myself am temporarily not very much in favor. You must do what you can for yourself, as we all must. Besides, there is a war on."

Viewed from space on an accelerated time scale, Earth's peoples might have been taken for one

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organism. Occasionally the organism would have a convulsion. Moving like microbes down arteries, the human specks would slide down their traffic lanes and converge on various points on the globe until those points began to look like sores on the cuticle of the sphere.

The inflammation would grow, would seem to be a mere diseased confusion, until a change took place. The specks would draw back from a central object, producing a semblance of orderliness. This central object would stand out like a pustule, a stormhead of infection. Then it would burst, or appear to burst, and fly outwards, As if some intolerable pressure had thus been relieved, the people that resembled specks to the cosmic observer would now disperse, possibly to reassemble later at one of the other trouble spots on the globule. Meanwhile, the ejected spot of matter hurtled outwards — making the cosmic eye duck out of the way and attend to its own business.

This particular blob of ejected matter bore the name *S. S. Gansas* engraved in glucinated beryllium letters three yards tall on her bows. Once clear of the platter of the solar system, however, the name became scarcely legible even to the most hypothetical observer; the ship entered TP flight.

Transponential is one of those ideas that have hung on the fringes of man's mind since he first found tongue to express himself, and probably before; almost certainly before, since it is the least puissant who dream most fervently of omnipotence. For expressed semantically, transponential flight reveals itself as the very opposite of travel; it causes the ship to stand still and the universe to move in the desired direction.

Or perhaps it was explained more accurately by Dr. Chosissy in his World Progress Lecture of 2033, when he said, "However surprising it may seem to those of us brought up in the cosy certainty of Einsteinian physics, the variable factor in the new Buzzardian equations proves to be the universe. Distance may be said to be annihilated. We recognize at last that distance is only a mathematical concept having no real existence in the Buzzardian universe. During TP flight, it is no longer possible to say that the universe surrounds the starship. More accurately, we should say that the starship surrounds the universe."

The ancient dreams of power had been realized, and the mountain came obediently to Mahomet . . .

Back on the strange planet called Earth, the third politan called Blug Lugug was in a terrible state of mental confusion.

He was strapped to a bench with a series of strong canvas straps that passed across what was left of his body. A number of wires and cables ran from machines that stood silent or gargled to themselves on one side of the room and climbed into his body or into his various orifices. One cable in particular ran from one instrument in particular worked by one man in particular; the man was dressed in a white sort of clothing,

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and when he moved a lever with his hand, something without meaning happened in the third politan's brain. This meaningless thing was more awful than anything the third politan had known existed. He saw now how right the Sacred Cosmopolitan had been when he used the term *bad* to describe these thinlegs. Here was *bad bad bad*: it reared up before him, sturdy and strong and hygienic, and gnawed away his intelligence bit by bit.

The something without meaning came again. A gulf opened where there had been something growing, something delightful, memories or promises, who knows?, but something never to be replaced.

One of the thinlegs spoke. Mainly, in gasps, the politan imitated what had been said: "noneuralresponse-there/either. He doesn'thave/apain responsein/his/wholebody!"

He still clung to the notion that when they realized he could imitate their speech, they would be intelligent enough to stop the things they were doing. Whatever they were doing, whatever inside their mad little minds they imagined they were doing, they were spoiling his chances of entering the carrion stage; for already they had removed two of his limbs with a saw — from the corner of his misting eyes he watched the bin in which they had been deposited — and since there were no ammp trees here, the possibility of his continuing the cycles of being was remote. Nothingness confronted him.

He cried an imitation of their words but, forgetting their limitations, pushed it high into his upper voice range. The sounds came distorted; his ockpu orifices were clogged with tiny instruments like leeches.

He needed comfort from the Sacred Cosmopolitan, his worshipped father-mother. But the cosmopolitan had gone, no doubt to the same gradual dismemberment. Hhe grorgs had gone; he caught their almost supersonic cries answer him in lament from a distant part of the room. Then the something without meaning burst over him again, so that he could no longer hear — but what was it that he had been able to . . . been able to what? Something else had gone.

In his dizziness, he saw that a new figure had joined the figures in white. In his dizziness. he thought he recognized the new figure. It was —or it was very like—the figure that had performed the dung ritual a brief time ago.

Now the figure cried something, and through the growing dizziness the politan tried to cry the same thing back, to show it had recognized him: "Ican'tbeartowatchyou'redoing somethingthatshouldneverbedone!"

But the thinlegs, if it was that specific one, gave no sign of recognition. He covered the front part of his upper head with his hands and went fast from the room, almost as if —

The something without meaning came again, and the white figures all looked eagerly at their instruments.

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Tipped far back until his toes were level with his head, the Director of the Exozoo lay in his therapad and sucked a glucose mixture through a teat. He was being calmed by a young man, now a member of the Exploration Corps with an Explorer's certificate, who had once trained under him at the zoo. Gussie Phipps, who had flown from Macao, offered comfort.

"You're not so tough as you used to be, Sir Mihaly. How many vivisections have you performed yourself?"

"I know, I know, you needn't remind me. It was just the sight of that particular poor creature there on the stone, slowly being chopped into little bits and not registering anything detectable as pain or fear."

"Which should make it better rather than worse."

"Heavens, I know it should! But it was so darned *unresentful*! I had a feeling for a moment I was in at a preview of how man will treat any intelligent opposition it meets out there." He gestured vaguely towards the patterned ceiling. "Or perhaps I mean that beneath the scientific etiquette of the vivisection bench I heard the savage drums of ancient man, still beating away like mad for a blood-letting session. What is man up to, Gussie?"

"Such an outburst of pessimism is unlike you. We're coming away from the mud, away from the primeval slime, away from the animal, towards the spiritual. We have a long way to go, but—"

"Yes, it's an answer I've often used myself. We may not be very nice now but we'll be nicer at some unspecified future time. But is it true? Oughtn't we to have stayed in the mud? Mightn't it be more healthy and sane down there? And are we just giving ourselves excuses to carry on as we always did? Think how many primitive rites are still with us in a thin disguise: vivisection, giving in marriage, cosmetics, hunting, wars, circumcision — no, I don't want to think of any more. It's time I retired, Gussie, got away while I'm not too aged, moved to some simpler clime where the sun shines. I've always thought that the amount of thought that goes on inside a man's head is in inverse proportion to the amount of sunshine that goes on outside it."

The door globe chimed.

"I'm expecting nobody," Pasztor said, with an irritability he rarely showed. "Go and see who it is for me, Gussie, and shoo them away. I want to hear all about Macao from you."

Phipps disappeared, to return with Enid Ainson, weeping.

Nipping with momentary savagery on the end of his glucose teat, Pasztor jacked himself into a less relaxed position and stuck a leg out of the therapad.

"It's Bruce, Mihaly!" Enid cried. "Bruce has disappeared. I'm sure he's drowned himself. Oh, Mihaly, he's been so difficult! What can I do?"

"When did you last see him?"

"He couldn't stand the disgrace of being turned down for the *Gansas*. I know he's drowned himself. He often threatened he would."

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"When did you last see him, Enid?"

"Whatever shall I do? I must let poor Aylmer know!"

Pasztor climbed out of the pad. He gripped Phipps' elbow as he moved towards the technivision.

"We'll have to hear about Macao some other time, Gussie," he said.

He began to technivise the police, while Enid wept in a business-like way behind him.

Bruce Ainson was already a fair distance beyond the reach of Earth police.

On the day after the *Gansas* was ejected into space, a much less publicized flight began. Blasting from a small operational spaceport on the East coast of England, a systemship started its long haul across the ecliptic. Systemships were an altogether different sort of spaceship from the starships. They carried no TP drive. They fuelled on ions, consuming most of their bulk as they travelled. They were built for duties within the solar system only, and most of them that left Britain nowadays were military craft.

The *I. S. Brunner* was no exception. It was a trooper, packed to the hull with reinforcements for the Anglo-Brabilian war on Charon. Among those reinforcements was an ageing and troubled nonentity named B. Ainson, who had been mustered as a clerk.

That sullen outcast of the solar family, Charon, known generally to soldiers as the Deep Freeze Planet, had been discovered telescopically by the Wilkins-Pressman Lunar Observatory almost two decades before it was visited by man. The First Charon Expedition (on which was a brilliant young Hungarian dramatist and biologist named Mihaly Pasztor) discovered it to be the father of all billiard balls, a globe some three thousand miles in diameter (3007.558 miles, according to the latest edition of the Brazilian Military Manual, 3009.657 miles according to its British equivalent). This globe was without feature, its surface smooth in texture, white in color, slippery, and almost without chemical properties. It was hard, but not extremely hard. It could be bored into with high speed drills.

To say that Charon had no atmosphere was inaccurate. The smooth white surface was the atmosphere, frozen out over the long and unspeakably tedious centuries during which Charon, a travelling morgue without benefit of bones, trundled its bulk about its orbit, connected by what hardly seemed more than coincidence with a first magnitude star called Sol. When the atmosphere was dug and analyzed, it was found to consist of a mixture of inert gases packed together into a form unknown to and unreproducible in Earth's laboratories. Somewhere below this surface, seismographic reports indicated, was the real Charon: a rocky and pulseless heart a hundred miles across.

The Deep Freeze Planet was an ideal place on which to hold wars.

Despite their excellent effect on trade, wars have a deleterious effect on the human body; so they became, during the second decade

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of the twenty-first century, codified, regulated, umpired, as much subject to skill as a baseball game or to law as a judge's table talk. Because Earth was very crowded wars were banished to Charon. There the globe had been marked out with tremendous lines of latitude and longitude, like a celestial checkerboard.

Earth was by no means peacefully inclined. In consequence, there were frequently waiting lists for space on Charon, the lists consisting mainly of belligerent nations who wished to book regions about the equator, where the light for fighting was slightly better. The Brazilian-English war occupied Sectors 159-260, adjacent to the current Javanese-Guinean conflict, and had been dragging on since the year 1999. A Contained Conflict it was called.

The rules of Contained Conflict were many and involved. For instance, the weapons of destruction were rigidly defined. And certain highly qualified social ranks — who might bring their side unfair advantages — were forbidden on Charon. Penalties for breaking such rules were very high. And, for all the precautions that were taken, casualties among combatants were also high.

In consequence, the flower of English youth, to say nothing of blooms of a blowsier age, were needed on Charon; Bruce Ainson had taken advantage of that fact to enlist as a man without social rank and to slip quietly out of the public eye. A century earlier, he would probably have joined the Foreign Legion.

As the little ion-driven trooper carried him now over the ten light hours that separated Earth and Charon, he might, had he known of it, have reflected with contempt on Sir Mihaly Pasztor's glib remark that the amount of thought in a man's head is in inverse proportion to the amount of sun outside it. He might have so reflected, if only the *Brunner* permitted reflection among the men packed between its decks head to tail; but Ainson, together with all his companions, went out to the Deep Freeze Planet in deep freeze.

XI

Like a dog that has been harshly spoken to, the universe had resumed its customary position. No longer did it cause the *Gansas* to surround it. Instead it surrounded the big ship, and the big ship sat on the planet with its nose in the air.

In honor of the ship's captain, the planet had been christened Pestalozzi — though as Navigator Gleet had pointed out there were more pleasant names.

Everything on Pestalozzi was fine.

Its air contained the right admixture of oxygen at ground level, and lacked any vapors that might offend terrestrial lungs. Even better, it harbored — and they had Med Section's word for it — no bacterium or virus that Med Section could not cope with if necessary.

The *Gansas* had landed near the equator. The midday temperature had not risen above twenty degrees

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Celsius, but at night it had not sunk below nine degrees.

The period of axial revolution corresponded conveniently with Earth's, taking a notch over twenty-four hours and nine minutes. Which meant that a point on the equator would be travelling faster than an equivalent point on Earth, for one great disadvantage about Pestalozzi was that it was a world with considerable mass.

Rest periods had been ordered after midday mess. Most of the crew had voluntarily started slimming. For ninety-eight pound weaklings on Pestalozzi weighed 294 pounds.

There were compensations for this crippling tripling, chief among which was the discovery of the aliens.

When it had sat on its haunches smelling the air, observing solar emissions, ground radioactivity, magnastic bathytherms and other phenomena for two days, the *Gansas* emitted small snooper craft. As well as having an exploratory function, these flights were calculated to relieve cosmophobia.

Honeybunch sat at the controls of one of these craft, flying according to Lattimore's instructions. Lattimore was in a state of great excitement, which communicated itself to the rating sitting next to him, Hank Quilter. They both gripped the rail and stared at the tawny lands rippling beneath them like the flank of a vast and vastly galloping beast . . .

A beast we'll learn to tame and ride, thought Lattimore, trying to analyze the choking sensation in his breast. This is what that whole school of minor writers was fumbling to say last century before space travel began, and ye gods and little fishes, they had more than was acknowledged. Because this is the genuine and only thing, to feel the squeeze in your cells of a different gravity, to ride over a ground innocent of all thought of man, to be the first that ever burst.

It was like getting your childhood back. A big savage childhood. Once, long ago, you'd gone behind the lavender bushes at the bottom of the garden and had stepped into terra incognita. Here it was again, and every stalk of grass a lavender bush.

He checked himself.

"Hover," he ordered. "Alien life ahead."

They hovered, and beneath them a broad and lazy river was fringed with salad beds. In isolated troups the rhinomen worked or sheltered behind trees.

Lattimore and Quilter looked at each other.

"Set her down," Lattimore ordered.

Honeybunch set her down more daintily than he had ever handled woman.

"Better have your rifles in case there's trouble," Lattimore said.

They picked up their rifles and climbed with care to the ground. Ankles were easily broken at current weights, despite the hastily devised supports that they all wore to thigh height under their trousers.

A line of trees stood about eighty

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yards west of them. The three men headed for the trees, picking their way through rows of cultivated plants that resembled bolting lettuce, except that their leaves were as large and coarse as rhubarb leaves.

The trees were enormous, but notable chiefly for what looked like the malformation of their trunks. They swelled and spread, each of them double lobed. They approximated the shape of the aliens with their plump bodies and two sharp heads. From their crests aerial roots tapered, many of them, like crude fingers. The foliage bristling on their topknots grew in a sort of stiff turbulence, so that again Lattimore felt the shiver of wonder; here was something his weary intellect had not contemplated before.

As the three moved towards these trees, rifles half-raised in traditional gesture, four-winged birds — butterflies the size of eagles — clattered out of the tousled foliage, circled and made away towards the low hills on the far side of the river. Beneath the trees, half a dozen rhinomen stood to watch the men approach. Their smell was familiar to Lattimore. He released the safety button of his rifle.

"I didn't realize they were so big," Honeybunch said softly. "Are they going to charge us? We can't run. Hadn't we better get back to the snooper?"

"They're all ready to run," Quilter said. He wiped his wet lips with his hand.

Lattimore had judged that the mildly swivelling heads of the aliens indicated no more than curiosity, but he welcomed this token that Quilter felt as much in control of the situation as he did.

"Keep walking, Honeybunch," he said.

But Honeybunch had glanced back over his shoulder at their craft. He let out a cry.

"Hey, they're attacking from behind!"

Seven of the aliens, two of them big chaps with gray hides, approached the snooper from behind, were moving towards it inquisitively, were only a few yards from it. Honeybunch lugged the rifle up to his hips and fired.

His first shot missed. The second found a target. The men heard the californium slug hit with a force equivalent to seventeen tons of TNT. One of the big gray fellows heeled over, a crater torn in the smooth terrain of his back.

The other creatures moved to their companion as Honeybunch's rifle came up again.

"Hold your fire!" Lattimore said.

His voice was cut off by the roar of Quilter's rifle on his left. Ahead, one of the smaller aliens burst, a head and shoulders blown away.

Unknown tendons in Lattimore's neck and face tightened. He saw the rest of the stupid things standing there, nonplussed, but giving no appearance of fear or anger, certainly showing no inclination to run. They could feel nothing! If they had not sense enough to see the power of men, they should be taught it. There wasn't a species living that

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didn't know about man and his fire-power. What were they good for, but to serve as targets?

Lattimore brought his rifle up. It was a short mechanism with collapsible butt, semi-silenced, semi-recoiless, firing a .5 slug on single or automatic. It went off just as Quilter fired again.

They stood there shoulder to shoulder, firing until the seven aliens were blown asunder. Now Honeybunch was crying for them to stop. Lattimore and Quilter recognized each other's expressions.

"If we went up in the snooper and flew low, we might throw a scare into them and get a moving target," Lattimore said. He polished up his spectacles, which had misted, on the front of his shirt.

Quilter wiped his dry lips on the back of his hand.

"Somebody ought to teach those slugs how to run," he agreed.

Mrs. Warhoon, meanwhile stood speechless before perfection. She had been invited aboard the captain's snooper, and they had descended to investigate what looked like an untidy cluster of ruins in the interior of the equatorial continent.

There they had found proof of the aliens' intellectual status. There were the mines, the foundries, the refineries, the factories, the laboratories, the launching pads — all domesticated down to the level of a cottage industry. The entire industrial process had turned into a folk art. The spaceships were homespun. They knew then, as they walked unmolested among the snorting aliens, that they were in the midst of an immemorial race. Here was an antiquity venerable beyond the imagining of man.

Captain Pestalozzi had stopped and lit a mescahale.

"Degenerate," he had said. "A race in decline, that's obvious."

"I don't think anything is obvious. We are too far from Earth for anything to be obvious."

"You've only got to look at the things," the captain had replied. He had little sympathy for Mrs. Warhoon; she was too knowledgeable, and when she wandered away from his party, he felt nothing but a slight relief.

It was then that she had stumbled on perfection.

The few buildings were scattered, and informal rather than negligible architecturally. All walls sloped inwards towards curving roofs; they were built either of bricks or precision-shaped stones, both materials being wrought to interlock, so that no mortar or cement was used. Whether this was a style dictated by the 3G gravity or by artistic whim, Mrs. Warhoon was content to leave undecided until much later. She much disliked the sort of uninformed conclusions jumped to by the captain. With the thought of him bearing on her mind, she entered one of the buildings no more elaborate than its neighbors, and there the statue stood.

Her throat constricted, she walked round it.

God knew what it was doing standing in a stinking shack.

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It was a statue of one of the aliens. She did not need telling it had been wrought by one of the aliens. What she did need telling was whether the work had been done yesterday or thirty-six centuries ago. After a while, when this thought had made the circuit of her brain several times, it registered on her attention, and she realized why she had postulated thirty-six centuries. That would be the age of the Egyptian XVIIIth Dynasty statue of a seated figure she often went to contemplate in the British Museum. This work, carved like the other out of a dark granite, had some of the same qualities.

The alien stood on his six limbs, in perfect balance, one of his pointed heads a shade more elevated than the other. Between the catenary curve of his spine and the parabola of his belly lay the great symmetrical boat of his body. She felt curiously humble to be in the room with him; for this was beauty, and for the first time she held in the hollow of her understanding a knowledge of what beauty was: the reconciliation between humanity and geometry, between the personal and the impersonal, between the spirit and the body.

Now Mrs. Warhoon shook inside her mock-male. She saw a lot of things which, because they were important, she did not wildly want to see.

She saw that here was a civilized race that had come to its maturity by a very different path from man's. For this race from the start and continuously (or without more than a brief intermission) had never been in conflict with nature and the natural scene that sustained it. It had remained in rapport, undivorced. Consequently, its struggle towards the sort of abilities living in this shaped granite — ah, but the philosopher and the sculptor, the man of the spirit and the man with the instrument, had been one here! — was the struggle with its natural repose (torpor, many would have said); while man's struggle had in the main been an outward struggle, against forces that he saw as being in opposition to him.

As surely and simply as Mrs. Warhoon saw all this, she saw that mankind could not fail to misunderstand this life form. As this was a race without pain, as it was a race without fear, it would remain alien to man.

She had her arm about the flank of the statue, her temple resting on its polished side.

She wept.

It was then that the distant shouts broke in on her melancholy. Shots followed, and then the whistles and wails of aliens. Captain Pestalozzi was having or creating trouble.

Wearily, she stood up and brushed her hair off her forehead. She told herself she was being silly. Without looking again at the figure, she went to the door of the building.

Four ship's days later, the *Gansas* was ready to move on to the next planet.

After the experiences of the first day, despite all that a rather hys-

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terical Mrs. Warhoon could say, it was generally agreed that the aliens were a degenerate form of life, if anything rather worse than animals, and were therefore fair game for the natural high spirits of the men. For a day or two, a little hunting could hurt no one.

True, it soon became obvious from planetary sweeps that Pestalozzi harboured only a few hundred thousand of the large sexipeds, congregating around wallows and artificially created swamps. These began to show evidence that they resented the old Adam in their Eden. But several specimens were captured and penned aboard the *Gansas*; Mrs. Warhoon's statue was likewise collected, and a number of artifacts of a miscellaneous nature.

Disappointingly, there were few other life forms on the planet; several varieties of bird, six-legged rodents, lizards, armor-plated flies, fish and crustacea in the rivers and oceans, an interesting shrew discovered in the Arctic regions that seemed to be an exception to the rule that small warm-blooded animals could not survive in such conditions. Little else. Methodically, the Exo Section stocked up the ship.

They were ready to embark on the next leg of their reconnaissance.

Mrs. Warhoon went with the ship's padre, the ship's adjutant, Lattimore and Quilter (who had just been promoted to a new post as Lattimore's assistant) to say goodbye to Samuel Melmoth, alias Aylmer Ainson, in his stockade.

"I just hope he's going to be all right," Mrs. Warhoon said.

"Stop worrying. He's got enough ammunition here to shoot every living thing on the planet," Lattimore said. He was irritated by his new success with the woman. Ever since the first day on Pestalozzi when she had suddenly become chummy and climbed into his bed, Hilary had been weepy and unsettled. Lattimore reckoned he was easy-going enough where women were concerned, but he liked some token that his attentions had a benevolent effect.

He stood by the gate of the stockade, resting on his thigh crutches and feeling vaguely aggrieved with the universe. The others could say farewell to young Ainson. Speaking for himself, he had enough of the Ainsons.

The stockade was of reinforced wire net. It formed a wall eight feet high about two square acres of ground. A stream ran through the ground. Some damage had been done in the way of trampling down vegetation and shattering trees by the labor force detailed to erect the stockade, but apart from that the area represened a typical bit of Pestalozzi country. By the rivulet was a wallow which led to one of the low native houses. Salad and vegetable beds lay by the wallow, and the whole patch was sheltered rather delightfully by the outrageous trees.

Beyond the trees stood the automatic observation post, its radio mast rising gracefully into the air. Next to it was the eight-roomed building designed from prefabricated parts for Ainson's residence.

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Two of the rooms constituted his living space; the others contained all the apparatus he would need for recording and interpreting the alien language, an armory, medical and other supplies, the power plant, and the food synthesizer, which could be fed water, soil, rock, anything, and would turn them into nourishment.

Beyond the works of man, keeping apart and considerably abashed, sat an adult female alien and her offspring. Both had all limbs retracted. Good luck to the lot of them, Lattimore thought, and let's get to hell out of here.

"May you find peace here, my son," said the padre, taking Ainson's hand and jogging it.

"Good luck in your work, Melmoth," said the adjutant. "We'll be seeing you."

"Adios, Sam, and I'm sorry about that black eye I gave you," Quilter said, clapping Ainson on the back.

"Are you sure there's nothing else you need?" asked Mrs. Warhoon.

Responding as adequately as possible to their words, Aylmer turned and hobbled into his new home. They had rigged him ingenious crutches to combat the gravity, but he had yet to get accustomed to them. He went and lay down on his bed, put his hands behind his head, and listened to them departing.

XII

Old Aylmer was oblivious to Snok Snok Karn's efforts to rouse him until the young utod lifted him up with four legs and shook him gently.

"You must bring yourself to full wakefulness, my dear Manlegs," Snok Snok said. "Fit your crutches on and come to the door."

"My old bones are stiff, Snok Snok. I quite enjoy their stiffness, as long as I'm left horizontal to do so."

"You prepare yourself for the carrion stage of life," the utod said. He had over the years trained himself to talk only through his casspu and oral orifices; in that way, he and Ainson could converse after a fashion. "When you change to carrion, Mother and I will plant you under the ammps, and in your next cycle you shall become a utod."

"Thank you very much, but I'm certain that that wasn't what you woke me for. What's the matter? What's worrying you?"

That was a phrase that in forty years' association with Ainson Snok Snok had never understood. He passed it over.

"Some menlegs are coming here. I saw them bumping on a round-legged four-legs towards our middenstead."

Ainson was buckling on his leg supports.

"Men? I don't believe it, after all these years."

Picking up his crutches, he made his way down the corridor to the front door. On either side of him were doors he had not opened for a long while, doors sealing off rooms containing weapons and ammunition, recording apparatus and rotted supplies; he heeded this material no more than he did the automatic observation post which had long since

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wilted. together with its aerial, under the majesty of Dapdrof's storms and gravitic pull.

The grorgs scuttled ahead of Snok Snok and Ainson and plunged on into the middenstead where Quequo gently reclined. Snok Snok and Ainson halted in the doorway, looking ahead through the wire. A four-wheeled overlander had just drawn up at the gate.

Forty years, Ainson thought. Forty years peace and quiet — not all of it so damn welcome, either — and they have to come and disturb me now! They might have let me die in peace. I reckon I could have managed that before the next esod, and I've no objection to being buried under the ammp trees.

He whistled his grorg back to him, and stood waiting where he was. Three men jumped from the truck.

As an afterthought, Ainson went back down the corridor, pushed his way into the little armory, and stood there adjusting his eyes to the light. Dust lay thickly everywhere. He opened a metal box, took a dull-shining rifle from within. But the ammunition, where was that? He looked round at the muddle in disgust, dropped the weapon onto the dirty floor and shuffled back into the corridor. He had picked up too much peace on Dapdrof to go shooting at his age.

One of the men from the four-wheeler was almost at the front door. He had left his two companions at the entrance to the stockade.

Ainson quailed. How did you address your own kind? This particular fellow did not look easy to address. Although he might well be sightly older than Ainson, he had not spent forty years under 3Gs. He wore uniform; no doubt service life kept his body healthy, whatever it did to his mind. He wore the well-fed but sanctimonious expression of one who has dined at a bishop's table.

"You are Samuel Melmoth, of the *Gansas*?" the soldier asked. He stood in a neutral pose, legs braced against the gravity, blocking the door with his bulk. Ainson gaped at the sight of him; bipeds in clothes looked odd when you were unused to the phenomenon.

"Melmoth?" the soldier repeated.

Ainson had no idea what the fellow meant. Nor could he think of anything that might be regarded as a suitable answer.

"Come, come, you are Melmoth of the *Gansas*, aren't you?"

Again the words just baffled.

"He has made a mistake," Snok Snok suggested, regarding the newcomer closely.

"Can't you keep your specimens in their wallows? You are Melmoth; I begin to recognize you now. Why don't you answer me?"

A tatter of an ancient formula stirred in Ainson's mind. Ammps, but this was agony!

"Looks like rain," he said.

"You *do* talk! I'm afraid that you've had rather a wait for your relief. How are you, Melmoth? You don't remember me, do you?"

Hopelessly, Ainson peered at the military figure before him. He rec-

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ollected nobody from his life on Earth except his father.

"I'm afraid... It's been so long .... I've been alone."

"Forty-one years, by my reckoning. My name's Quilter, Hank Quilter, Captain of the starraider *Hightail*... Quilter. You don't remember me?"

"It's been so long..."

"I gave you a black eye once. It's been on my conscience all these years. When I was directed to this battle sector, I took the chance to come and see you. I'm happy to find you haven't been harboring a grudge against me, though it's a blow to a fellow's pride to find they just are forgotten. How's tricks been on Pestalozzi?"

He wanted to be genial to this fellow who seemed to bear him good will, but somehow he couldn't get the line of talk sorted out.

"Eh... Pesta... Pesta... I've been stuck here on Dapdrof all these years." Then he thought of something he wanted to say, something that must have worried him for—oh, maybe for ten wears, but that a long way back. He leaned against the doorpost, cleared his throat and asked, "Why didn't they come for me, Captain . . . er, Captain?"

"Captain Quilter. Hank. I really wonder you don't remember me. I remember you clearly, and I've done a helluva lot of things these last... Oh, well, that's past history, and what you ask me demands an answer. Mind if I come in."

"Come in? Oh, you can come in."

Captain Quilter looked over the old cripple's shoulders, sniffed, and shook his head. Plainly the old boy had gone native and had the hogs in with him.

"Perhaps you'd better come on out to the truck. I've got a shot of bourbon there you could probably use."

"Eh, okay. Can Snok Snok and Quequo come along too?"

"For crying sakes! These two boys? They stink... You may be used to it, Melmoth, but I'm not. Let me give you a hand."

Angrily, Ainson brushed the offered arm away. He hobbled forward on his crutches.

"Won't be long, Snok Snok," he said, in the language they had contrived between them. "I've just got to get a little matter sorted out."

With pleasure, he noted that he was puffing far less than the captain. At the truck they both rested, while the two rankers looked on with furtive interest. Almost apologetically, the captain offered a bottle; when Ainson refused it, the other drank deep. Ainson spent the interval trying to think of something friendly to say.

All he could think of was, "They never came for me, Captain."

"It wasn't anyone's fault, Melmoth. You've been well away from trouble here, believe me. On Earth, there has been a whole packet of woes. I'd better tell you about it.

"Remember the old type Contained Conflicts they used to have on Charon? Well, there was an Anglo-Brazilian conflict that got out of hand. The Britishers started contravening the laws of warfare as

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they then were. It was proved that they had smuggled in a Master Explorer, which was a social rank not allowed in the conflicts — in case they took advantage of their expert knowledge to exploit the local terrain, you know. I studied the whole incident in Mil. Hist. school, but you forget the finer details. Anyhow, this explorer fellow Ainson was brought back to Earth for trial, and he was shot, and the Brazilians said he committed suicide, and the Britishers said the Brazilians shot him, and well, the States got involved — turned out an American revolver was found outside the prison, and in no time a war blew up, just like old times."

Old Ainson had come so adrift in this account, he could think of nothing to say. Mention of his own name had befogged him.

"Did you think I'd been shot?" he asked.

Quilter took a drag at his bourbon.

"We didn't know what had happened to you. The International War broke out on Earth in 2037, and we sort of forgot about you. Though there has been a lot of fighting in this sector of space, particularly on Numbers and Genesis. They're practically destroyed. Clementina caught a packet too. You were lucky there were only conventional forces here. Didn't you see anything of the fighting here?"

"Fighting on Dapdrof?"

"Fighting on Pestalozzi."

"No fighting here, I don't know about there."

"You must have escaped it in this hemisphere. The north hemisphere is practically fried, judging by what I saw of it on the way in."

"You never came for me."

"Hell, I'm explaining, aren't I? Only a very few people knew of you, and I guess most of them are dead now. I stuck my neck out to get to you. Now I've got a ship of my own under my command, I'd be glad to take you home — well, there's only a fragment of Great Britain left, but you'd be welcome in the States. It'd sort of square up that old black eye, hey? What do you say, Melmoth?"

Ainson sucked at the bottle. He could hardly take in the idea of going back to Earth. There would be so much he would miss. But one ought to want to get back home, and there was his duty . . . "That reminds me, captain. I've got all the tapes and recordings and vocabularies and stuff."

"What stuff's that?"

"Why, now you're forgetting. The stuff I was landed here to get. I have worked out a good bit of the utodian language — the language of these . . . these aliens, you know."

Quilter looked very uncomfortable. He wiped his lips with his fist.

"Perhaps we could pick that up some other time."

"What, in another forty years? Oh, no, I'm not going back to Earth without that gear, captain. Why, it's my life work."

"Quite so," said Quilter with a sigh. A life's work, he thought. And how often was a life's work of no value except to the worker. He

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hadn't the heart to tell this poor old shell that the aliens were practically extinct, eradicated by the hazards of war from all the planets of the Six Star Cluster, except for some dwindling hundreds here on the southern hemisphere of Pestalozzi. It was one of the sad accidents of life.

"We'll take whatever you want to take, Melmoth," he said heavily.

It was all happening too fast for Ainson. He felt himself on the verge of tears. Quilter patted his back.

"You'll be okay. There must be a pile of credits waiting somewhere in a bank for you. I'll see you get every cent that's due to you. You'll be glad to get out of this crushing gravity."

Coughing, the old figure stirred his crutches. How could he say farewell to dear old Quequo, who had done so much to teach him some of her wisdom, and Snok Snok... He began to weep.

Quilter tactfully turned his back and surveyed the stiff spring foliage around him.

"It's the unaccustomed drink, Captain Printer," Ainson said in a minute. "Did you tell me England had been destroyed?"

"Now don't start worrying about that, Melmoth.

"But you said England..."

"They are damming half the North Sea to replace the disintegrated areas with topsoil, and London is going to be rebuilt — on a modest scale, of course."

Affectionately, he put an arm round the curved shoulders, thinking what a stretch of history was embraced in that narrow space.

The old boy shook his head with vigor, scattering tears.

"Trouble is, after all these years I'm out of touch. Why, I don't think I'll ever be in contact with anyone properly any more."

Moved, Quilter cleared a lump from his own throat. Forty years! You didn't wonder the old guy felt as he did. How the grokkies would lap up the story!

"Why now, that's a pack of nonsense. You and I have soon got things straight between each other, haven't we, Melmoth?"

"Yes, yes, that certainly is so, Captain Quinto."

At last the military vehicle bumped away from the stockade. Limbs deretracted, the two utods stood stood on the edge of the middenstead and watched it until it was out of sight. Only then did the younger turn to look at the older. Speech inaccessible to human ears passed between them.

The younger one moved into the deserted building. He examined the armory. The soldiers had left it untouched, as directed by the one who had spoken about the deaths of so many utods. Satisfied, he turned back and walked without pause through the gate of the stockade. He had remained patiently captive for a small fraction of his life. Now it was time that he thought about freedom.

Time, too, that the rest of his brothers thought about freedom.

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PACKAGE DEAL

BY JAMES STAMERS

ILLUSTRATED BY NODEL

The natives were awfully friendly — as long as you obeyed a few simple rules!

The Igglehome he had paid for was not there. He, Oliver Bin, Galactic Civil Servant Grade 93 (retired) had let himself be swindled by an Iggleeater.

Retire on only fifteen thousand dollars a month, enjoy salubrious climate in highly favored Instant Home with unsurpassed modern conveniences. Small planet far from traffic noise. Package Deal. Igglearth Government Approved.

That's what it said. But there was no house; there was not even a subdivision.

Broad cultivated strips of Iggle flowered, purple and white, in wide bands of color from beyond the horizon and stopped abruptly where the Igglehome should have been. Beyond that was nothing but a spaced line of large empty barns and bare rock. The Igglearth breeze blew freely in his ears.

"Oliver," whined his wife from the back seat of the vertijet. "Stop staring at the view. I'm tired. Jet on to our new home, how much further is it, I don't know why we don't buy a bigger car, the Allsons used to have one twice as big as this and he was only grade 92, sometimes I wonder if you really care about me."

She wobbled her fat cheeks sadly, grasped the large box of Igglecandy tighter and curled up in front of the televisor again. "The Secret Sins of

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Senator Simple, a family politico-comedy beamed daily to our subsidiary stations throughout Igglearth for your enjoyment. Have you tried Iggle syrup the new ziplated way?"

"Yes, dear," said Oliver Bin absently.

Rather than think of what Gloria Bin would say when she learned there was no Igglehome, he allowed his mind to wander on the peculiar problems of the Iggleeaters. The Iggle flower was not only their staple food, it was their only food. No substitute had yet been found in the entire galaxy. And their population, like everyone else's population, needed more of everything every year, particularly more food. And that in turn explained the enormous strips of cultivated Iggle sweeping over the horizon. Perhaps the Igglearth government had decided it needed the land for more Iggle and had canceled the Igglehome development.

Oliver cheered up. At least then he would be entitled to a refund from the Igglearth government. And naturally they would pay. He had investigated the Igglearth government before putting himself and his wife under their absolute control, of course, and he knew there was hardly a single complaint on record against the Population Control Board of Igglearth. As a Civil Servant (retired) Oliver appreciated the administrative efficiency this simple fact showed.

A small official Igglearth car came zooming up the airway and backjetted to a halt beside them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bin?" asked a thin, purple Iggleeater.

"Yes. I assume there has been some licensing difficulty about the Igglehome and well, it's a disappointment but . . . "

"Difficulty?" cried the Iggleeater, sliding out of his car and balancing erect. "Why, no. No, no! We Iggleeaters pride ourselves on putting everything in its place in its time. No, no, difficulty none is."

"Why are you causing trouble, Oliver?"

"I, er, that is—well, where are the Igglehomes?"

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bin, if you will so kindly as to follow me, I will portray to you jointly where is your highly favored Instant Home with unsurpassed modern conveniences."

The Iggleeater tottered off across the bare rock. Oliver helped his wife from the car and followed.

"Do you mean this . . . " Gloria Bin began. " . . . This . . . this desert is our home? Oliver!"

"Yes, dear," Oliver answered, hurrying ahead to catch up with the Iggleeater, who was now bending over something on the rocks.

Oliver joined him and stared down at a small parcel with a label waving idly in the breeze. *Living Room, West,* the label said.

"All is in order," beamed the Iggleeater. "Here . . . and here . . . and there . . . and there."

The Iggleeater pointed to a series of small packages spaced out along the bare rock, each with a label fluttering above its white, opaque covering.

"Your Instant Home, highly favored, with unsurpassing modern conveniences."

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Gloria Bin came up to where they stood and stared, panting, at the row of white parcels. The large barn behind the parcels and in line with the Iggle beds caught her eye.

"Am I supposed to live in a barn? Oliver, do something!"

"Er, I . . . yes, well, I think some explanation . . . ."

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bin, do you mean you are not familiar with the fruits of Igglearth science? Do you mean you have not heard of our prowess and fame in bacterial control, our Double-Nobel prizes in microbiological organization? Principles of Instant Home to you glorious news is?"

"Of course we know," Gloria Bin said quickly, digging Oliver in the ribs and sending him sideways a couple of steps.

"I'm afraid I don't," said Oliver truthfully.

"No kidding?" beamed the Iggleeater. "Then I explain will." It appeared that starting with the controlled use of bacteria in refining metal ores and working up from simple sulphur-eating organisms, elementary oxidizing bacteria and reducing viruses, the Iggleeaters had gained control of a virtual army of working microorganisms, each adapted to a special task.

"And capable in combination of constructing the useful and destructing waste product with equal facility," finished the Iggleeater.

"So?" said Gloria Bim grimly.

"So I will now show dear Mr. and Mrs. Bin how Igglearth science controls microbiologics to create" —the Iggleeater produced a long syringe from inside his robes and sprayed the nearest white package carefully — "Instant Living Room, West."

There was a shimmer of movement as the white opaque covering on the package began to dissolve, to expose a working contents which looked like active yeast made of cement. It overflowed and ran out along the dock in neat thin lines, and rose into the air around them in pale blue walls. A light webbing grew across the top, thickened and solidified into a ceiling. Circular openings framed themselves in opposite walls and a syrupy substance foamed up to crystallize as windows. Oliver and Gloria Bin looked out of their Living Room, West, at the bare rock around.

"Allow me," beamed the Iggleeater, running out of the room to spray the other parcels lying waiting beneath their labels.

As they watched, the remainder of the house spread itself out and grew up into completion, pink, blue, green, perfectly formed and entire as an Instant Home.

From their patio, with Instant barbecue pit, Oliver saw scattered groups of other people standing still while their Instant Homes grew around them. Within an hour, the entire subdivision was created.

"This is the last Igglehome available," beamed the Iggleeater. "Population Control only allows so many in a subdivision, you know."

He spun happily and led them over to the barn nearest to their Instant Igglehome.

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"And this, dear Mr. and Mrs. Bin, you may use as an extra carport, compliments of the Igglearth government, free of charge. You will see it is intended for the Iggle flower. But until you plant your compulsory beds there will be no need of this granary, and so please use it as extra space."

"Compulsory beds?"

"Ah, yes, dear Mr. Bin. I am sure you know it is a condition in your contract with the Igglearth government. Every owner of an Igglehome must plant a new half-acre of Iggle and must take care of it, singing to it twice each week during the growing season. Favorable effects of resonance of human voice, you know, most stimulating for growing Iggle."

"I'm not at all sure I . . . "

"There can be no contract without it," said the Iggleeater firmly.

"Nonsense, Oliver, of course you can! If you think I'm going to go back and face our old neighbors just because you . . . "

"Yes, dear."

"Then that's settled," beamed the Iggleeater. "Of course, we recommend you merely extend the existing Iggle beds across the back here to cover a new half-acre. Then they won't be in your way at all. And the Igglearth government will take care of the harvesting. Just consider, dear Mr. Bin, how gravely we Iggleeaters need Iggle. You will be helping us. Interplanetary good will and all that, you know. And in appreciation, there is a little surprise for you. One moment."

And the Iggleeater trotted rapidly into the barn. They heard him moving heavy objects about. Then he stuck the forepart of his body out of the door.

"Do come in. Here you see the free bonus of a grateful Igglearth government."

Oliver and Gloria Bin walked into the barn to see mounded white parcels stacked on top of each other along the entire length of one wall of the barn. Two gift-wrapped parcels with red stripes stood to one side where the Iggleeater had pushed them.

"A little error," explained the Iggleeater smoothly. "You don't want things like that around, oh, ho. Fear not, I will return them to Population Control. But see here, dear Mr. and Mrs. Bin, just read the labels on your free bonus packages."

"Instant Hotpoint; Instant games—pool; Instant communications; Instant furniture—lamps; Instant hi-fi; Instant larder—chicken division . . . Why, Oliver, here's some Instant candy! And look at this Instant self-cleaning wall-to-wall carpeting in variable colors. Why, it's marvelous!"

Gloria Bin pecked her husband on the cheek briefly and went back to rummaging among the vast assortment of white parcels.

The Iggleeater picked up the two striped packages and tottered out of the door with them.

"Don't forget," he said. "Half an acre of Iggle. I will return this time next year. The Iggle will be in flower then."

"Ooo, look, Oliver! Instant mink."

Oliver looked until he grew tired of looking and wandered off to meet their new neighbors.

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After the first week, the Bins had collected quite an extensive set of new friends, the Clayborns, Watts, Wittles, Mavepiaccis, the Ngobos and the Przzcks. The Clayborns in particular, for they were the Bins' nearest neighbors, and George Clayborn and Oliver worked their half-acre strips of Iggle together. Breaking the rock was difficult but George Clayborn was a large and thickly muscled man. With the aid of Instant beer Oliver carried more than his share in the twice-weekly baritone duet to the growing Iggle.

"Tell me, George," Oliver asked one night as they stood out by the Iggle strip, "don't you feel an idiot singing to plants?"

"Don't think about it much, Oliver. Never got past a Ph.D. myself. I don't understand these things. Sing the fellow says, so I sing. Come back to my place and have another Instant alcohol. Mimi's taken a fancy to you."

Oliver blushed in the darkness, but he followed Clayborn back to the Igglehome, stumbling over one of the four Clayborn children on the way.

"Sorry about the window, Mr. Bin," said the child.

"Think nothing of it," Oliver answered. "We're not out of Instant windows yet."

"Oh, hell," shouted George Clayborn over his shoulder. "Forgot I have to put in a new instant plumbing fixture in the kid's playroom. Just go ahead, Oliver. Tell Mimi I'll be in in a couple of hours. Putting a new one in is no problem but I guess they forgot the difficulties of getting rid of the old plumbing. What we need is an Instant dissolver. Then life here would be perfect."

He disappeared into the darkness with his children and Oliver went on into their house.

Mimi Clayborn was waiting.

"Why, Oliver," she smiled. "How nice to see. Where's George?"

"Fixing the plumbing. He'll be a couple of hours, he says."

Mimi Clayborn slunk across the thick carpet, wiggling her hips slightly. Her negligee turned colors as she walked and, as she passed a table-lamp, went plainly transparent for a moment. Oliver blushed and looked away.

"George says we need an Instant dissolver," Oliver said, trying to keep the occasion on a cerebral level.

"Why, Oliver," smiled Mimi Clayborn, glancing down at her negligee, "I didn't know you had such thoughts."

"I, er—Gloria thought a label said Instant broiler the other day," Oliver stammered. "And instead of a precooked chicken, now we've got an enormous steam-heat boiler in the kitchen. I guess they get careless with the labels."

"Here, Oliver," interrupted Mimi gently, handing him a large glass of spiced alcohol and peering up into his face. "I do admire you, Oliver. I think you put up with a lot."

Oliver swirled his glass, looking into it with intense interest utterly unjustified by the transparent contents.

"After all," Mimi went on, "what more could any woman ask for? Almost everything you can think of out

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there in the barn, and all we have to do is squirt it and, poof, there it is, furs, jewelry, dresses. Almost everything."

She let her voice drop sadly and looked at Oliver out of the corner of her slanted eyes.

"Almost," she repeated and, by accident, snuggled closer to Oliver.

"I think I'd better be getting home," said Oliver, swallowing hastily.

"Of course they do make mistakes," Mimi added, holding up her negligee to show a disconnected seam down the side. "See, it never formed properly along here."

And she stuck out a long slim leg for his inspection.

"I. um—yes, well, good night," stammered Oliver and shot away into the yard. Although he wondered while he walked back to his own Igglehome why he had left in such a hurry. After all, this was a new planet and a new way of life. Considering her purely impersonally, of course, Mimi Clayborn was a very attractive young woman, no doubt about that. And George was a good sound fellow and a friend, although not educated. Oliver wondered what she saw in a man who quit after his Ph.D. Yessir she certainly was an attractive woman and . . .

"Oliver, is that you? In the morning I want you to carry this old furniture out to the barn."

"Yes, dear," Oliver answered automatically.

He walked into his house to find Gloria had altered all the living room furniture again. A new Instant table, chairs, lounger and hi-fi were just solidifying and a massive pile of discarded tables and chairs stood piled up against one wall.

Oh, not again, he thought but he said nothing.

"Don't you dare look like that, Oliver Bin," said Gloria threateningly. "I will have what I want in my house, do you hear me?"

"Yes, dear."

It would take him a week to carry all that stuff out to the barn, even with George Clayborn's help. And that was another thing the Igglehome failed to take into account: Gloria's passion for changing her mind and the entire decor of the house. She was much firmer about not wasting any of the packages containing anything he wanted. For example, there was a pool table in the barn which Oliver had seen the first day. It was still in the barn.

In fact, it took a careful campaign of agreeable silence from Oliver and judicious flattery, plus a large box of Iggle-candy, from George Clayborn before Gloria would agree to the Instant pool table.

"But not in the house, understand that. If you want to waste time with silly games, Oliver, you do it on the patio. Do you understand? I won't have my decor ruined by an ugly pool table."

"Yes, dear."

"So what?" George said afterwards. "They have weather control on this planet, don't they? It never rains in a subdivision area. We'll just grow a couple of windbreakers and set it up on the patio, like the lady says."

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Oliver smiled gratefully and followed George out to the barn, to dig their way through the abandoned furniture and junk that was steadily eating up the available space.

"Here it is," shouted George. "Instant Games—Pool."

They carried the big white package back to Oliver's patio and set it down.

"Well," panted Oliver. "It must be a good one with a slate bed."

He leaned on the package and rested.

"Oh, no, Oliver," said Gloria Bin from the window. "Don't you put a big thing like that so close to our Igglehome. You take it out there away from the house where I don't have to look at it."

"But we can't, dear. That area is reserved for Iggle. We can't grow anything else there."

"Oliver! Either you put it out there or you take it straight back to the barn, do you hear?"

"Yes, dear."

George shrugged.

"Don't worry," he said, "the Iggleeaters won't be back for another six months. We'll think of something before that. Come on, Oliver; we'll put it down between your house and ours and I'll share the blame with you."

Oliver smiled gratefully and they carried the large package out of sight of Oliver's house. They set it down. George took out a spraygun.

"Here, Oliver. You start it off and declare the pool-room open."

Oliver squirted the parcel happily and stood back to watch.

But not far enough.

The parcel opened rapidly, running out on all sides of them, sinking into the Earth and liquifying as it went. They found themselves standing in the middle of a rapidly filling swimming pool, gleaming with ceramic tile and full of clear water. There was even a webbing forming into a diving board at one end.

"Curse it all," spat Oliver, hauling himself dripping from the pool. "I might have known the Iggleeaters would foul it up somehow! There's a catch in everything they give us."

"Oh, I dunno," said George Clayborn thoughtfully. "It could be worse. Mimi used to be very fond of swimming and I expect the kids will enjoy it."

Oliver sat dejected and streaming wet on the edge of the wrong sort of Instant games—pool.

"You wait and see," he said in gloom. "It'll breed some damned insect with Igglearth diseases that we haven't a cure for."

"You have a point. But we'll just disinfect it regularly, that's all."

"What with? There isn't a disinfectant in the whole place. I cut my finger a couple of months ago and couldn't find a thing to put on it."

"I know you're disappointed, Oliver, but cheer up. Your finger healed, didn't it? Well then, we can take it there's no need of disinfectants normally. But I'll soon make safe. I'm a bit of a chemist, you know. Just go home and sleep it off. By the time the pool needs it I'll have something worked up, you'll see."

Oliver nodded dourly and plodded damply home.

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And in fact the new pool worked out very well. As George had said, Mimi Clayborn was fond of swimming, or at least fond of lying around the swimming pool in a variety of swimsuits of a healthy, modern kind, allowing maximum exposure to the beneficial effects of the two Igglearth suns. More, her children were not there all the time, and by gradually extending periods of coincidence, Oliver was—whenever Mimi was.

To save trouble, they set up an Instant still on the edge of the pool, dipped briefly in the water and spent peaceful hours sunning on the edge, protected from the wind by the tall screens that hid the pool from view.

One evening George joined them, carrying a large jar of green liquid.

"Here," he said. "The water looks as if it needs refreshing. Try this."

And he threw the contents of the jar into the pool.

"Let it spread around," he said. "It's disinfectant with a chlorine base, so try not to drink it undiluted. I have to get back to tearing up the central heating. We're putting in airglow. Getting rid of the old stuff is some job, believe me."

He took the children away with him leaving Oliver and Mimi alone.

"Have another alcohol," prompted Mimi. "What's Gloria doing tonight?"

"Eating Iggle-candy and watching Igglevision."

"You can tell without looking, can't you?"

"I don't see why not," said Oliver truthfully. "She rarely does anything else."

"Have another alcohol."

"Thanks," Oliver accepted. "I like your swimsuit."

"You do? Of course, it fits better when it's wet."

And Mimi slipped into the pool and paddled a few strokes.

"See," she whispered, hauling herself out. "Look at the colors here—and here."

Oliver looked. At that moment, the swim suit began to dissolve.

Mimi screamed, very quietly, and made vaguely protective gestures with her hands.

"Er, —" Oliver began, standing up in confusion on the edge of the pool. He lost his footing and fell into the water with a splash and a thud, hitting the bottom as it rapidly drained.

He lay still, momentarily stunned.

"Oliver, Oliver!"

Oliver opened his eyes to see Mimi Clayborn wading beside him in the sinking waters. A small white package with a label fell surprisingly onto his bare chest. *Instant swim suit,* it said.

"Why, that's the one I was wearing," said Mimi, pink and gleaming in the pool beside him. "And yours has gone too, Oliver! Poor dear," she added, stroking his head. "You had a nasty bump, Just lie still and let me look after it."

Next morning George came with them to inspect the pool, empty and punctured in an irregular splotch. They stood around looking at it.

"Must be something to do with

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that disinfectant," George suggested.

"I'm sure it is," agreed Oliver. "I ran a record tape a few times this morning. As far as I can understand the Igglearth scientific jargon, all cellular organic systems are in a constant state of being built up and torn down, new cells being formed and old cells being destroyed as they become waste. So I gather we've upset the balance of the viruses that made this pool—and thrown it back."

"Back where?" asked George.

"Back into a potential state. You know how difficult it is to kill a virus. Some viruses can take a crystalline form and exist that way indefinitely until their environment calls them into life again."

"My, Oliver, you're clever," breathed Mimi.

"Yeah, yeah," George said, giving her a look. "So prove it."

"I think I can," said Oliver with new confidence. "Have you any more of that disinfectant?"

"Sure."

"Perhaps you'd be kind enough to fetch it, George," Oliver said crisply.

"Okay, okay."

George was back with another large green jar full of chlorine disinfectant within a few minutes. He handed it to Oliver. "Now what?"

"Now we withdraw a few yards—and watch."

Oliver threw the full contents into the pool, stood back and waited.

The pool shimmered in movement and began to shrink. It dissolved back toward a central point, built itself into a cube, developed a thick coating and settled into final shape, a small piece on top detaching itself to form a label. And there it sat in the bottom of a large pool-shaped hole in the bare rock. When they clambered down to look at it, the label read clearly *Instant games—pool.*

"Very well," Oliver said briskly. "Now squirt it again as if it were a new package."

George did so.

They watched the pool develop out of its package and fill the hole in the rack exactly as it had done in the first place.

"Why isn't there a hole in it now?" George demanded.

"Because it's organic material. Bugs, George. Automatic rebuilding of damaged parts of the colony. In potential in a package . . . out fully assembled . . . back in potential . . . back in action again! Don't think it makes any difference to the viruses or whatever the Iggleeaters are using in this particular material."

"Well, now I've seen everything," George said slowly.

"And what's more," added Oliver, "there's the answer to hiding the pool when the Iggleeaters come to inspect the Iggle flower. And meanwhile, there's the solution to your problems of tearing out the old plumbing, and to my problem of getting rid of the furniture Gloria doesn't want any more."

"Boy, you're a genius," shouted George, smacking Oliver on the back. "Let's start on that. We've been here a year now, we've got the half-acres in Iggle. And I bet we can talk our way round this little hole where next

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year's Iggle is meant to grow. Let's go disinfect the barns and get rid of all that old junk lying around the place. It'll make an impression on the Iggleeaters."

"What are we waiting for?" Oliver demanded.

They marched back to the Clayborn's Igglehome, shared out the disinfectant between them and shook hands. Mimi went off to their barn with her husband, looking back over her shoulder at Oliver as she went. They blew kisses at each other behind George's back.

Oliver entered his barn with a light heart.

"Don't think," said Gloria, with her hands on her large hips, standing facing him as he entered, "that I don't know what you're up to, Oliver."

Oliver balanced the disinfectant in his hand.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said grandly. "Have you run out of Igglecandy again? Well, we'll soon make room so that you can see where the remaining packages are. If there are any remaining packages after the rate you have been gobbling this last year."

He walked calmly round the barn, sprinkling disinfectant on the piles of junk, discarded furniture, clothes, household equipment and stacked discards Gloria had made him drag out piece by piece during the past year.

"Oliver!" she began threateningly.

"Oops, so sorry," said Oliver, continuing to spray disinfectant.

"Oliver! Look what you've done!

But Oliver marched on into the recesses of the barn, spraying energetically from his supply of disinfectant.

It occurred to him after a while that he must have walked in a full circle through the mounded junk, for some of it was already wet when he reached it. Then a large drop of rain fell on his head from the roof of the barn.

Looking up, he could see beads of liquid running along the inside of the roof and falling in an accelerating tempo on the contents of the barn. His first thought was that it would nullify the disinfectant, and then he remembered there was supposed to be weather control on the planet. Yet another example of Iggleeater organization turning sour. He shrugged and continued to distribute the disinfectant until it was all gone.

Around him, the contents of the barn were in violent movement despite the leaky roof. All the discarded household furniture was dissolving and repackaging itself. Here and there, complete white packages had formed already with their labels complete.

A large green splash of liquid fell off the roof onto his hand. There must be quite a storm outside.

He made his way to the door of the barn, ignoring Gloria's screaming protests from somewhere inside the mounds of repackaging activity.

Oliver looked out. It was a deluge. Rain fell and ran in streams all over the bare rock. And he could see it was running down to the Igglehomes in torrents. The entire subdi-

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vision would be flooded unless everyone shut their outer doors. And they had no reason to do that—unless they were warned.

He searched quickly in the pile of packages beside him. He knew he had seen one here . . . and here it was: *Instant communications.*

Oliver grabbed it and ran through the rain to his Igglehome, splashing wildly as he went. He shot in through the main port and fumbled with the communication package. Rain from his clothes and hands and shoes scattered over the carpet, making a mess that Gloria would create a fuss about—not that he cared any more.

He squirted the Instant communication package.

It formed, with agonizing slowness, into an ancient twentieth century telephone. But there was no exchange on the planet and no wires. It was a collector's item, utterly useless for practical purposes. He threw it angrily away.

There was a televisor in the second living room.

He rushed in, turned on the dials and watched the entire instrument begin to dissolve and repackage itself. As it went, Oliver heard someone else's angry voice saying, "Weather control, what's happened to the weather? Weather control! Why don't you answer?"

The emergency network would not operate either and the hi-fi was dead.

It was only then that Oliver realized that everything he touched was dissolving.

He should have washed his hands before he came in from the barn, washed off all the disinfectant first. He rushed to the nearest Instant bathroom.

It was already repackaging itself.

As Oliver watched, the roof of the Igglehome continued to leak green rain from the deluge outside. The rain itself was doing it.

He saw the living room cave in, and the wall-to-wall carpeting sliding away beneath him. He had barely time to reach the patio outside the Igglehome before that too trembled and collapsed.

He watched his Igglehome dissolve entirely and become a neat row of packages, spread out as if waiting for a new beginning.

Oliver looked up dully and saw that the same thing was happening to the entire subdivision. All over the valley, groups of people stood about watching their Igglehomes reconvert into tidy packages. Then, like all the others, Oliver ran for the protection of the barn. At least that seemed to be made of more permanent materials. Being made for the storage of Iggle flowers there was presumably no Instant nonsense about it.

He came in out of the rain, brushed himself as dry as he could and sat down on a large parcel by the door. He read the label idly for want of anything else to do. It was a large fat parcel, and the label read, *Instant Henpecker.*

And as that reminded him of Gloria, he looked round for his wife, expecting to see her stuffing herself with Igglecandy as usual.

He could not see her. The white packages had straightened into order-

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ly piles and lines, and she could hardly be lying down behind a parcel. Unless she were dehydrated, Oliver thought, she could not hide behind any of the parcels. Then the association of thought ran rapidly through his mind, from dehydration to crystalline form, to virus and to virus infection, to crystals of sugar in Igglecandy and to a question. *Was* it crystals of sugar in Igglecandy? An overdose of Igglecandy followed by a freak storm might just possibly . . .

Oliver realized he was sitting on his packaged wife.

He stood up, stared at the label—then he laughed and sat down on the fat package again.

Well, he might just forgive the Iggleeaters for their uahygienic methods of making candy, in the circumstances. "Instant Henpecker" was about right. He threw back his head and laughed aloud.

A little error would not hurt, he felt. Even a large fat error. And an unlawful thought entered Oliver Bin's head. Why shouldn't he organize a little error of his own—say packaging George Clayborn? It shouldn't be too difficult. A little nibble of Igglecandy now and then, and a little touch of disinfectant, and presto, Mimi would be for all practical purposes a widow.

Oliver stood up, gathered his coat over his head and ran rapidly through the belting rain to the Clayborn's barn.

"Er, George . . . " Oliver began as he entered.

He fell flat on his face over a row of parcels beside the door.

A label dangled beside his nose on the floor, and he read it with one eye, *Instant Oddjobman.* Beside it, four other parcels said plainly on each *Instant Child.*

Oliver stood up.

Well, that saved trouble, anyway. Apparently the Clayborn family ate Igglecandy wholesale too. He examined the fifth package and smiled fondly at the label. *Instant Love.* He picked it up and staggered back to his barn with Mimi safely packaged in his arms.

The rain had stopped and the Igglesuns were twinly drying out the rocks, bare now of anything except white packages and the isolated barns and the long stands of Iggle flower.

Inside the barn, Oliver put the large package on the floor gently, reached into his pocket for the activating syringe and paused thoughtfully.

The sound of racing jets carried into the barn on the breeze. A little late but here apparently was an Iggleeater rescue team.

Perhaps it would be wiser to wait until they had gone away again. That would give him another year to think of a convincing reason for Mimi and himself to be living together in the absence of George and Gloria.

Oliver put the syringe back into his pocket. His hand caught on something, he tugged at it, and finally looked down.

A thick white film was forming over his legs, up to and over his waist, trapping his hand and the syringe in his pocket, over his chest.

The whole barn was growing tall-

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er. No, he was shrinking! He had a sudden flaming thirst and it finally struck him that Iggle alcohol was as rich in sugars as Igglecandy. He was infected in the same way as the others. He was in process of being reversed into potential and packaged.

The film crept over his mouth as he folded silently up. Oliver's last thought was that being nearest to the door perhaps he would be the first to be reactivated by the Iggleeaters. There was just a chance he could prevent them from reactivating anyone except Mimi. At worst, they would all be back where they started.

An Iggleeater stepped rapidly into the barn, looked at the packages representing Oliver Bin, Mimi Clayborn and Gloria Bin, and with great care placed them in an isolated spot. Then he stuck the forepart of his body out of the door.

"Do come in," he said. "Here you see the free bonus of a grateful Iggleeater government in return for your extending another half acre of Iggle."

A young couple walked into the barn and admired the stacked white packages.

"What are those?" asked the young man, pointing to the three gift-wrapped parcels with red stripes on one side where the Iggleeater had just put them.

"A little error," explained the Iggleeater smoothly. "You don't want things like that around, oh, ho. Fear not, I will return them to Population Control."

The Iggleeater picked up the three striped packages and tottered out of the door with them.

"I know you'll like this brand new subdivision," he said. "And you're lucky. Quite soon now there will be only complete desert and I don't know how we can grow Iggle there in such unpopular areas. But perhaps Population Control will think of something."

He paused in the doorway.

"Don't forget," he said. "Half an acre of Iggle. I will return this time next year. The Iggle will be in flower by then." END

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The Apprentice God

BY MIRIAM ALLEN DeFORD

I can tell it to you, sir, only the way it happened:
I had no slightest intent to cause such devastation.
Believe me, I was only unquestioning and obedient.

(He paused here, scripter alert. His under-brain grew dim.
He shuddered, overwhelmed by justified resentment.
The atomic clock marked the slow inexorable minutes;
Outside the dome the two moons met and passed.
He sighed, and forced himself to the necessary abasement.)

You must recall you uttered no cautious word of warning,
Merely gave me the globe and issued your curt command:
"Surface analysis, pupil. Report it to me tomorrow."

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I scanned the tiny sphere—gray streaks on a bluish green,
Specks scattered here and there that might be natural features
Or only surface dirt. I pondered the likeliest methods.
First wipe it clean. A film came off where I flicked it lightly.
Too delicate, it seemed, for any vigorous scrubbing.
Perhaps if I warmed it, then? I held it to the heat:
It melted off in patches. I let it cool again,
Gingerly probed and poked it, brushed it over with magnets.
Fine dust appeared. I turned the little globe over and shook it.
Moisture dripped down from it that I gathered into a vessel—
A cupful only. I wiped the minuscule sphericle dry,
Glanced at my wiping cloth and found a greenish stain . . .
I had scarred and scabbed it enough; I shook the dust onto a plate.

(Anger seized him again. His brain felt fogged. He paced
The prison cubicle, remembering the master's fury,
Impervious to excuse, remembering his own chilly horror
At the callous revelation—a horror that went unshared.
Why had he not been cautioned? Let it go: there was one road only
To exculpation, to freedom, to a future worth the living.
With steely resolution he set to his vindication.)

A globe the size of a pebble—the little dust I had gathered
Almost too small to study under the strongest lenses.
I did my unmost, master. I analyzed as you had taught me.
It was hardly worth the endeavor; the components were ordinary,
The liquid: hydrogen, oxygen; the solids: nitrogen, carbon;
Microscopic traces of iron; a few other metals;
Almost invisible compounds resembling clay and limestone . . .
I noted all, and reported. How else could I have obeyed you?
Moreover, sir,—

(He paused, with searching tentacle-tip
Touched the aching cut beneath his lowest eye-stalk,
Where a fragment, at scalpel's prick,
had leapt from the globe and struck him.)

I suffered bodily damage, barely escaped being blinded
For distant vision forever, here in my lowest eye.
Indeed, sir, your implication I played some silly prank,
Or worse, that I harmed the specimen out of deliberate malice—

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Forgive me; I know you are just, I know you must surely have spoken
From under-brain emotion. You called me "knave or fool"—
I do not deem myself either; but if one, more fool than knave!

("Humble yourself," he muttered. "No need to incense him further:
He holds the final power over your aspirations.
How could you live at all, cast out from the world of workers?")
Sir, I am deeply repentant and eager to make amends.
Since by my fault I ruined this rare and valuable object
Beyond all remedy, tell me where I may find,
At any cost whatever, another such for your use.
Could I search for one, beg one, buy one? It was surely not unique.
This specimen came from somewhere, somewhere there must be others.
Only give me my chance, admit me again to your favor.

("No, no!" his shocked heart murmured, and generous anger shook him.
But cold necessity conquered. He must. He wrote on.)

If you will, subject me besides to open and public confession,
Display the gouges, the scratches, the spoiled and ugly remnant:
I will acknowledge all came from my dull-witted blundering.

(The clock moved on, the night sky paled, amethystine,
The hard blue sun rose high over the sheltering dome.
Brooding, he sought for words to screen his ultimate nausea—
The thing he had tried to forget, the thing that would not stay forgotten.
The just, the wise, the all-knowing—but the merciful too, the all-feeling—
Where was he now, that master, god of his young devotion?
Not that he'd raged and scolded—to be anger's slave is but human;
Not that against himself that unfair wrath was directed:
No—he knew it and wept—the source of his deep revulsion,
Making a mock of forgiveness, hypocrisy of his pleading,
Lay in one question only: *why* was the master angry?
The words he had shrunken to hear echoed again in his memory:
"I trusted you, my best pupil, not to spoil the equipment.
This specimen cost me dear, and now it is useless rubbish."
. . . And merely as added grievance, coolly, to point the damage,
Voicing those awful words: "I suppose you realize
This was no man-made object, no artificial model:
This tiny globe was a world, as genuine as our own,
To us, infinitesimal, to its natives as real as ours!"

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"To its natives!" . . . Shuddering, frightened—the pupil, not the master:
The master infuriated, the pupil appalled and remorseful:
To the one, an extraneous trifle, to the other a blinding disclosure—
Value supreme to the one, brotherhood to the other:
Niggard and mean the master, only the pupil's compassion
Knowing life, all life, to be one, even the life of a dust-speck!
No, he could not go on, sacrifice once again
His microscopic brothers to the hazards of cold research,
Offer them up for murder by those to whom they were merely
Objects of alien interest. Despairing, he seized his scripter.),

Sir, it was dreadful to learn what I had done by my error—
Scraped mountains from their bases, scoured whole continents clean,
Poured oceans in a cup, scorched atmospheres away,
Learn that the shard that cut me was that world's mountain-peak.
So much, perhaps, I could bear, could even expiate,
Could find another globe for your experiments . . .
But if on that tortured sphere were living beings, too small
For sight, but not for death—even—O gods of space!—
Beings sentient and aware, beings like our great selves,
Lords of their puny earth as we of our mighty one—
Oh, sir, you may forgive me; I shall not forgive myself.
And *you* I do not forgive: you have made me a murderer.
Do what you will with me; I shall not again be your agent
To find another world for you to slaughter coldly.

(Long he gazed at the writing . . . And slowly sober expedience
Cast its web of self-interest around his selfless rage.
Hating himself, he expunged the futile cry of revulsion.
Trembling, he signed his name to the abject earlier plea . . .
And pressed the signal-key to send it forth to his master.)

— *Miriam Allen deFord*

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THE URBAN HELL

BY TOM PURDOM

What's the shape of tomorrow's city — spired Metropolis, or a worldwide sprawl of Levittown?

Traditionally the science-fiction portrait of the city of the future has been a vision of high towers and sweeping vistas, usually glimpsed at night. The hero steps onto a balcony two miles above the street, muses philosophically while observing the lights of a ship returning from the stars, and then returns to his mistress and the action of the story. Common enough to be a cliche — and a useful one when the backdrop has to be futuristic but isn't important to the story — the picture is essentially Manhattan Island without slums, noise and a traffic problem.

Decentralization has been another common idea. Uusually it is given some attention and sometimes it is even the major theme of the story. There is rarely any doubt the author thinks it would be a good idea. Sometimes the city is so decentralized, thanks to advanced technology, that it is practicaly invisible, and the happy inhabitants live in a rural paradise. In other cases, as in *Last Enemy,* one of H. Beam Piper's paratime stories, the

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city may be a group of skyscrapers set in a park. *Ossian's Ride*, a novel by the British astronomer Fred Hoyle, has a futuristic city of this type which is very well described. The narrator argues that modern construction methods have made low, sprawling cities such as London obsolete.

There have been many exceptions, of course. A famous one is Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel*, with its crowded, underground city sprawling along the Atlantic Seaboard. Another is Fritz Leiber's recent *X Marks the Pedwalk*, a comedy about armed conflict between the prosperous motorists who live in the suburbs and the pedestrians who live in the slum ring around the inner city — a story which may yet be unpleasantly accurate prophecy. And there had been cities in the sea, and cities under domes, and cities on the moon and the planets. The city is a narrow, crowded stage few writers can resist. But the dominent characteristics of the science-fiction city, almost since the first magazines hit the stands, have been *towering grandeur, decentralization*, and *regimented overcrowding*. Close your eyes, visualize a science-fiction city of the future, and see if what comes to your mind doesn't have most of these features.

In the meantime, in that sector of existence which convention calls reality, much has been happening. All over the world cities are in a state of transition. In Europe, where many cities were bombed, and in the United States, where many cities decayed, the bulldozers and the architects, and the philosophers and the planners, and the social forces of economics and technology, are now shaping the cities most of tomorrow's people will inhabit. A great argument about the city is enlivening the pages of books and periodicals, as well as hearing rooms, public meetings, and the offices of mayors and city councils. In recent years only the literature on arms control and disarmament has been as large, and as varied in its proposals, as the literature on city planning.

"The automobile," Robert Heinlein wrote in *The Roads Must Roll*, "made possible huge cities, then choked those same cities to death with their numbers... From a standpoint of speed alone the automobile made possible cities two hundred miles in diameter, but traffic congestion, and the inescapable, inherent danger of high-powered, individually operated vehicles cancelled out the possibility."

Not everyone has been so pessimistic. The automobile has been the favorite invention of a school which has influenced many a science-fiction story — the advocates of decentralization.

"Man liberated by the automobile," Frank Lloyd Wright prophesied. "No less than an acre to each individual man, woman and child... Liberal ground use is itself now one sure basis for culture and a more liberal education for America."

Wright's Broad Acres City was a typical plan for a decentralized ideal community. In Broad Acres City

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every dwelling was to have at least one acre of ground. Skyscrapers, where they were needed, were to have ground space in proportion to their height. The high-rise apartment house was to be tolerated only for the sake of those urbanites who might have trouble adjusting to rural life.

Every citizen of this imaginary city was to own at least one automobile. Most were to own several. For the poor, the automobiles were to be subsidized by the government — which would be cheaper, Wright felt, than expensive attempts to revive the obsolete centralized city.

Eventually Broad Acres City was to cover the United States, an even distribution of housing, business and culture. It was to be the fulfillment of Thomas Jefferson's dream of a democracy founded on small landholders.

To the prophets of decentralization, the big, crowded city is a dehumanizing evil — *Find the Citizen,* Wright captioned an aerial view of Manhattan's skyscrapers — which the automobile has made unnecessary. "Are there any institutions," asks Professor E. A. Gutkind of the Institute for Urban Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, "which can operate only in cities, or, to put it more generally, in localities the characteristics of which are "a" a considerable number of people and (b) a conglomeration of those people within a relatively narrow space? The reply can only be: there are none."

Professor Gutkind believes the old dream of creating the Ideal City must be forever abandoned. In *The Twilight of Cities* he advocates the creation of the Ideal Region.

His map of the Ideal Region is a good example of the type of urban planning. There is a Desk City near the center, for certain administrative functions, but every other big city institution is carefully distributed throughout the entire area. The center itself is mostly park, and plenty of park space separates the work centers and the various residential communities.

This is not, of course, the famous "urban sprawl" most of us have seen and probably inhabit. To Professor Gutkind the chief cause of urban sprawl is the centralized city. The present day metropolitan region cannot be laid out efficiently because it has huge centers to which everything else must be oriented. Only by destroying the centers can the planners disperse industrial units through the country and distribute cultural and social centers so that "easy mobility makes every place equally accessible without cumbersome delays."

The Ideal Region is Heinlein's city two hundred miles in diameter made practical by careful planning.

Dispersion and decentralization are not new ideas. Broad Acres City and the Ideal Region are only two recent examples of an old and popular dream.

At the end of the last century, Ebenezer Howard, a London court reporter who was interested in city planning, proposed the building of new "Garden Cities," to save the in-

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habitants of London's slums. Each Garden City was to be surrounded by a belt of green and every family was to have its own two-story dwelling. There was to be industry, but only just enough to provide the citizens with jobs. As the Greeks had built a new *polis* every time a city exceeded a certain size, so London was to spawn new towns in the countryside.

In the United States in the 1920's Garden Cities became an important element in the proposals of the regional planners, such as Lewis Mumford, who wanted to integrate Howard's towns into logical, carefully planned regions. These Decentrists were eloquent, dedicated people, and their thinking still influences city planning, although regional planning is still as far from

Not everyone agreed with How-
reality as it was in the age of Coo-
ard's vision of new towns in a green
ldge.
countryside. Le Corbusier, the French architect, thought the Garden City was a dream, for it would eventually be destroyed by traffic and by commercial needs. As an alternative he proposed the "vertical Garden City", which he called The Radiant City.

The Radiant City was twenty-seven skyscrapers in a park, and it is the ancestor of all such visions. By building high, Le Corbusier was able to propose a fantastically high population density, eleven hundred human beings per acre, and still use ninety-five per cent of the space for park. As a look at the latest high-rise apartment house surrounded by grass will inform you, the Radiant City still influences architects and city planners, as well as science-fiction writers.

In spite of the advanced age of these ideas, however, only two modern cities have actually been designed for the automobile. One is Los Angeles and the other is Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil.

Brasilia is a city most science-fiction readers would find familiar. With its monumental white buildings, its soaring arches and its sweeping expressways, it would look at home on the cover of most science-fiction magazines. No traffic lights and no pedestrians hinder the swift passage of Brasilia's automobiles. All intersections are underpasses and overpasses. The blocks, instead of being houses arranged along streets, are great white apartment super-blocks several stories high, separated by wide open spaces. The entire city is designed for a giant creature who can cover miles in minutes — the new wheeled species which has replaced the slow, curious biped called man.

Los Angeles hasn't exactly been planned. It grew, with the traffic engineers building new acres of freeway to accommodate the increasing numbers of automobiles. However, the civic leaders of Los Angeles seem to have felt dispersion was a good thing. Certainly they did nothing to prevent it. At present the city has almost no downtown, and most of its inhabitants live in one-family dwellings with yards. There are areas where people work, and there are areas where

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people live and shop, and it is usually impossible to get from one kind of an area to another without using a car. Ninety-five per cent of all travel within Los Angeles is by private automobile.

An illustrious citizen of the Los Angeles area is Raymond D. Bradbury. Mr. Bradbury is the author of a famous short story entitled *The Pedestrian.*

In recent years there has been a reaction against decentralization and against attempts to turn the big city into a Garden City or into Le Corbusier's dream. The decentralizers and the builders of high, isolated buildings surrounded by grass are no longer the *avant-garde.* The new *avant-garde,* and its members speak with a power and a logic which indicates they are probably the future Establishment, is the defenders of that obsolete, dying institution, the crowded, compact, terribly centralized big city.

Almost every major city in the United States now has some kind of urban renewal project designed to revitalize its downtown area. Even Los Angeles is attempting to build a downtown for itself with the 315 million dollar Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project. And though most of these projects are primarily concerned with office buildings, civic centers, and downtown shipping districts, many are also attempting to make the center of the city a place where people actually *live.*

The boom in apartment buildings is only the most visible sign of a new interest in urban living. Statistics indicate a small, but significant, trickle of returnees from the suburbs. Even more important when considering long term future trends, city governments have finally realized they need middle and upper class residents if the city is to have an adequate tax base. The city is beginning to compete with the suburbs. Suburban taxes are bound to rise, to pay for the new schools and other facilities the new residents need, and commuting times get longer as the suburbs move further from the city. Walking to work, and having part of your community's taxes paid by business, should look increasingly appealing to many people. The financiers who are putting up the capital for apartment houses are betting good money that downtown living has a future.

But the best indication the centralized city has a future is the emergence of a literature defending the city and even expressing love for it. Attacks on the automobile, the favorite weapon of the decentralizers, and hymns in praise of the values of city life are appearing even in mass circulation magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post.*

This is a major event in the intellectual history of the United States. Commentators have long argued that dislike of cities is one of our national traits. "The mobs of great cities," Thomas Jefferson wrote, "add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body." The writings of the Decentrists and of men like Wright and Gutkind are full of sentences which echo Jeffer-

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son by comparing the big city to a tumor or a cancer. And in *New Maps of Hell,* Kingsley Amis argued, convincingly, that science fiction hells are usually urban and science fiction utopias are usually rural. The science fiction Amis was discussing is largely an American literary form.

Probably the best known defender of the big city, and the sharpest critic of much current urban renewal, is Jane Jacobs, the author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* To this citizen of Manhattan, the densely populated big city is the prime generator of life and culture. Her book is a plea for city planning which preserves the city's concentration and the creativity of its "close grained diversity."

The simplest way to explain what Jane Jacobs means by close grained diversity, and why she considers it so valuable, is to consider a city street. Suppose the entire block is occupied by one office building and its concrete plaza, the typical modern approximation of the Radiant City. The only other establishment on the block is a restaurant in the building's bottom floor. Since the restaurant's only customers are the people who work in the building, it belongs to a chain, for no small entrepeneur can operate a restaurant which pays a high, new-building rental and is patronized only during the lunch hour and during coffee breaks. The restaurant closes down when the offices close. At night the block is deserted.

Now suppose the concrete plaza is replaced by old houses and one high rise apartment house. There will be people in the area at night, too, and cheap space for rent in the older buildings. A small restaurant will be economically feasible. If the restaurant is any good, people will come to the street from other parts of the city. A place where people go at night is a good location for a bar and the vicinity of a bar is a good location for a cigar store. Any place which attracts this much life is a logical place for other enterprises, book stores, theaters, cleaning establishments, and soon the office workers have several places to eat and shop on their lunch hour, and the people who live on the block have many conveniences.

In addition, the street is protected against hoodlums and muggers by something more effective than any police force can hope to be — a steady, day and night flow of legitimate traffic. Los Angeles, with its medium density, suburban type neighborhoods has the highest crime rate in the nation, a rate far ahead of the next two cities to compete for this honor. Infamous Chicago and evil old New York are fourth and fifth. Pedestrians are checked by the police in many Los Angeles neighborhoods — as in Bradbury's story — because a man on foot actually is a suspicious character. People in such neighborhoods who have legitimate business in them usuallly drive.

Cross-use and diversity are what make cities creative. Because a city

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is a place which attracts many people for many different reasons, it is the logical place to start any new enterprise. If you want to sell a new gadget, pass out pamphlets, organize a political party or market a new form of entertainment, you will naturally take your wares to the place where you can reach the most people with the least expense. Concentration causes more concentration. Diversity creates more diversity.

The principles which apply to commerce apply to culture. If one person in ten thousand wants a symphony orchestra, or a science-fiction magazine, then only a large concentration of people can put up the necessary money. These things may not be done for money, but they can't be done without money, either.

Anyone who has tried to buy a record or a book in a suburban shopping center will have no trouble appreciating this. Not only are prices often higher than in the city, but the range of selection is usually much narrower. Why stock an item which sells to one in ten thousand when the local population is only nine thousand, and you can fill your shelf space with the standardized items six thousand of them want? When the commuter wants something a little unusual, he buys it in the city on his lunch hour.

Science-fiction hells may be urban, but without big cities there probably wouldn't have been any science-fiction magazines.

One of the best examples of planning for diversity is modern Rotterdam, in which apartment buidings, many small shops, even amusement park attractions, are mingled with office buildings in the new Linjbaan. Other rebuilt parts of Rotterdam use the same principles. The idea is only beginning to gain favor in formal city planning in the United States, but some of the new developments in this country at least put town houses and apartment houses within walking distance of office buildings. Office buildings will be in the middle of Washington's new Southwest residential area, as one instance, and in some cases there will even be apartments inside office buildings.

Concentration, by the way, does not mean a city composed entirely of towering skyscraper office buildings and skyscraper apartment houses. Office buildings can be jammed together window to window, but if the high rise apartment house is to be attractive to tenants, its upper stories must be open to light and air. Even more important, Jane Jacobs demonstrates that a city in which all the residents live in high rises will lack the diversity which is the prime value of concentration. Combining row houses and duplexes, and other low buildings, with high rise apartment houses is the best way to get a high population density, between one and two hundred families per acre, without sacrificing diversity. The reasons for this are complicated, but it is safe to say the city of tomorrow will have a good supply of low buildings. If it doesn't, it will not fulfill the historic functions of the big city.

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The aim of the best modern city planning is not the grandiose, but the humane and the pleasant.

Corner drug stores and news stands, not to mention bars and groceries, are not very romantic or futuristic. The Radiant City, and lightly clad intellectuals discussing philosophy among the trees, are much more satisfying. Yet there is more to imagination than creating big, simple, beautiful pictures. Examining an intricate mechanism and trying to determine how it works and what useful work it does, is also an act of the imagination. It is the argument of the city's defenders that the big city is an intricate mechanism for generating human culture, and that we had better be sure we understand its complex workings before we start tearing it down.

Not all city planners feel the diversity has to be as close grained as Jane Jacobs wants it. Most city plans today call for dividing up the city into various specialized areas — a Central Business District, a Culture Center, residential neighborhoods and so on. In a city as big as Manhattan, this is probably a mistake, but in smaller cities it may not do any noticeable harm. The important, even surprising, development is that after decades of anti-city tirades, there is increasing agreement that no region can serve all the needs of the human species if it lacks a concentrated, densely populated center. "Only by being a complete expression of all the diverse human interests and activities can the city work," says Victor Gruen, the architect and city planner. "Leave out of the composite any of the ingredients—residing or administration or the museums—and you undermine the health of the city."

The great struggle of the modern city planner is the struggle to preserve the core of the city.

The concentration of the big city, it should be noted, works its magic primarily on people who are walking. Only the pedestrian can stop to examine a small shop window, or leaf through a magazine, or read a demonstrator's placard. The constant user of the automobile can be reached only by the mass media — the giant billboard, television commercials, huge department store windows — and by the big organizations which can pay for them.

It is impossible to design a concentrated downtown area in which the automobile can operate efficcently. The automobile uses up too much space. It needs broad streets, and even broader expressways, and, most demanding of all, it needs a place to park. In Los Angeles over two thirds of the downtown space is now devoted in some way to the automobile. No city with that much space devoted to one function can be as diversified as a big city has to be.

Manhattan is famous for its automobile traffic, but only seventeen per cent of the people entering the central business district drive their own cars. If the other eighty-three per cent switched to private trans-

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portation, the first seven stories of the entire island would have to be used for garages.

One of the most famous plans for dealing with the automobile is Victor Gruen's plan for downtown Fort Worth, a plan which called for the elimination of all automobile traffic in an area fifteen blocks square. The entire area was to be ringed by a road, and underground parking lots were to thrust from the road into the center. No point in the downtown area was to be more than three or four minutes from a garage.

Some fifty cities now have plans for some kind of pedestrian mall or auto-free downtown. Philadelphia, for example, is planning to close one of its major downtown shopping streets to automobiles; trolleys will carry shoppers along a twenty-four block stretch which includes Independence Hall, and the planners have mentioned sidewalk cafes and other amenities of city life. In Europe the Association of German Towns and Cities recently advocated an eight point program for eliminating all automobiles from downtown areas. The action of Julius Caesar, who banned all wheeled traffic from Rome during the daylight hours, looks increasingly sensible to city planners who discover that everything they do to make driving and parking easier only increases the number of cars in the city's streets.

Still, people have to get to the city somehow, even if they walk after they get there. No plan for a concentrated downtown can provide enough parking space if everyone who enters the area comes by car. Even Gruen's plan assumes that the number of bus riders in Fort Worth will increase from seventeen per cent to fifty per cent of those entering the downtown area.

The most obvious alternative to the automobile is public transportation. One bus, as the transit companies advertise, takes up the space of three cars and carries ten times as many people. One high speed transit line can carry as many passengers per hour as sixteen lanes of expressway. And buses and subways do not need parking space.

Anywhere you find support for the centralized city, you find a new interest in mass transit. San Francisco, after considering alternatives based on the automobile, recently voted to finance a high speed transit system across the bay to Oakland. The alternative was the destruction of a city which is loved throughout the world. Philadelphia, another centralized city which has been a leader in urban renewal, has been subsidizing commuter trains for several years now. Even Los Angeles now has a metropolitan Transit Authority which has drawn a subway system on the map of the metropolitan area. Forced to choose between the city and the automobile, some people are choosing the city.

Jane Jacobs has a method for dealing with the automobile which should appeal to urbanites with a sense of mischief. Since interesting cities are a hostile environment for automobiles, she feels city planners

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should simply ignore the metal hordes and try to build good cities. If wide sidewalks make cities better places to live, the sidewalks should be widened instead of the streets. If traffic lights with short cycles are good for buses, which have to stop at every corner anyway, and bad for cars, which move fastest when they aren't interrupted, the city should do what is best for buses. Diversify and concentrate the city, and it will be so attractive people will come to it even if they have to ride the trolley.

Improvements in public transportation would still be a big help. Heinlein suggested conveyor belts, which have the advantages of continuous flow, and they will probably find some limited use in moving sidewalks. Personal fliers, such as anti-grav units, would be another solution. Any science-fiction writer looking for a field which can use some imagination will find it in urban mass transportation. He should remember, however, that after several decades of spectacular improvement in transportation, all schemes for saving civilization by saving the city have one thing in common. They all depend heavily on that ancient form of transportation, the human legs, moving one after the other.

The automobile isn't the only modern phenomenon endangering the big city. The steady growth of our population is another development which will eventually confront us with sharp conflicts and basic decisions.

The problem is not overcrowding but the destruction of irreplaceable and beautiful countryside. At the present time the natural countryside of U.S. metropolitan areas is being turned into suburban residential neighborhoods at the rate of three thousand acres per day.

Life without a glimpse of anything but concrete and steel is one of the worst nightmares science fiction has given us. Life without any true wilderness, with all the natural landscape divided up into tiny one-family lots, isn't much better. A lawn is just as unnatural as a street. No man, no matter how much he loves the big city and the small town, can maintain a healthy psyche without occasionally visiting an unspoiled beach or a park big enough for an all day hike. "Woe unto them," said Isaiah, "that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place that they may be placed alone in the middle of the earth."

This is a conflict which can only intensify the muted, but real, conflict between the urban, suburban and rural ways of life. One of them may have to go. Natural land can only be saved by breaking up the big city and distributing its functions through a well planned region, as the decentralizers advocate, or by using less land for suburban housing. Moving more people into cities is another solution, but it will not be welcomed by people who hate big cities so much they left them for the suburbs.

If the big city and the true country are both worth saving, then

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cities and farm counties will have to start buying up land and zoning it so it can't be used for housing. William H. Whyte, Jr., the author of *The Organization Man,* suggested such a plan five years ago in a book called *The Exploding Metropolis.* Some limited beginnings have been made, but the prospects are poor. Selling land to real estate developers is too profitable. But if enough land were to be removed from the real estate market, developers would have to start building more compact suburbs.

Skyscraper suburbs may not be far fetched. If all the functions of the small town could be put into one, or at most a few, tall buildings, then thousands of suburbanites could be housed in truly rural park land. Already the high rise apartment house in the suburbs is an indication some people would rather share a country estate than be sole owner of a back yard. Le Corbusier's Radiant City may find its true role as the Radiant Suburb.

Motopia, a scheme of the English architect and landscaper G. A. Jellicoe, is another intriguing possibility. In Motopia a grid five stories high imposes a checkerboard pattern on the countryside. Inside each square is park and wood land, with a few public buildings such as schools and churches. The grid itself is essentially an apartment house with stores and restaurants on the ground floor.

The key feature is the roads, which are on top of the grid, on the roofs of the apartments, carefully concealed by hedges. All travel by automobile is on these hidden roof roads, with no interference from pedestrians or from anything except other cars. All travel on the ground is on foot or by an electric water bus which travels on a system of canals. The plan is so simple and inviting Jellicoe makes you wonder why no one has built such a suburb.

The creation of new big cities could also relieve some of the pressure. There are several cities with populations of half a million or so which could add new metropolises to the United States of the future. A city does not have to be as big as New York to perform the creative tasks of the metropolis. The critical mass may be somewhere around a million. with a density around one hundred families per acre. One good test is to see how large a city has to be before it generates a symphony orchestra, a complex, expensive organization which is usually supported financially by less than a fifth of the population.

Whatever happens, it will not happen without conflict. The hearing rooms and the public meetings will not be peaceful again for many years. The current upheaval in civil rights for the Negro, and even the struggle to avoid thermonuclear war, do not present us with sharper conflicts of basic values than the steady urbanization of modern society. Urban planning is nothing less than planning for the good life. You cannot enter the debate without eventually asking questions about the purpose of human existence.

END

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Name of the Snake

BY R. A. LAFFERTY

ILLUSTRATED BY LAWRENCE

The Analoi had passed beyond human sin. They had to invent some of their own!

When Pio Quindecimo — *Confiteantur Domino misericordes ejus!* — had proclaimed it, it was received (even by the faithful) with a measure of ennui. Contingent, speculative, rhetorical — it was not thought of as touching on reality. Many of the emissions of Pio Q. did not touch on practicality. He was one of the outstanding Popes of the *ventunesimo*.

The encyclical was titled modestly 'Euntes Ergo Docete Omnes' — 'Going Therefore Teach Ye All.' Its substance was that this was a literal command of the Lord, and that the time had come to implement that command in its extreme meaning; that when the Lord had said "Go into all lands," He had not meant to go into all lands of one narrow earth only; that when the Lord said "Teach Ye All", it was not meant to teach all men only . . .

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within the narrow framework in which we have considered the term "men".

Should the command be taken literally, its implementation would cause far-reaching activity. It was in the implementation of the command that Padreco Barnaby was now on that remote and unearth planet, Analos.

Could one call the Analoi humans? Had their skeletal remains been discovered on old Earth, they would unhesitatingly have been classed as human. The oddly formed ears, not really as large as they seemed — somewhat Gothic in up-sweep, their slight caudal appendage, their remarkable facial mobility and chameleon-like complexions — these could not have been read from their bone remains. And how are we to say that their ears are more grotesque than our own? When did you last look at your own ears objectively? Are they not odd things to be sticking on the sides of a person's head?

"They are gargoyles," said an early visitor from Earth. Of course they were. The gargoyles had been copied by a still earlier visitor to Analos from Earth. But they were a lively and interesting bunch of gargoyles — mechanically civilized, ethically weird, artistically exciting. They were polished and polyglot, and in many ways more human than the humans.

On Alalos, the Padreco was at first a guest of Landmaster, a leading citizen. Here the Priest, speaking of his mission, first came up against the Wall.

"I can see what this might lead to, little priest," Landmaster told him when they discussed the situation. "It might even become bothersome to us — if we ever let anything bother us — if we had not passed beyond the stage where annoyance was possible. So long as you confined your activity to resident Earthlings and humans of that rescension there was no problem. Fortunately we do not fall within those categories. That being so, I do not see how your present aspirations can have any point of contact with us."

"You Analoi are sentient creatures of great natural intelligence, Landmaster. As such it is even possible that you have souls."

"We have souls that are fully realized. What could humans give us, who transcend humanity?"

"The Truth, the Way, the Life, the Baptism!"

"We have the first three greatly beyond yourselves. The last — the crabbed rite of a dying sect — what could that give us?"

"Forgiveness of your sins."

"But we haven't any sins. That's the whole point about us. We've long since passed beyond that. You humans are still awkward and guilt-ridden. You are of a species which *as yet has no adult form*. Vicariously we may be the adult form of yourselves. The idea of sin is an aspect of your early awkwardness."

"Everybody has sins, Landmaster."

"Only according to your own childish thesis, little priest. And consequent to that, you would reason

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that everybody must be saved — and by yourselves, a race of cropped-eared, flat-faced children.

"But consider how meaningless it becomes in relation to ourselves — the Analoi. How could we sin? What would we have to sin about? Our procreation no longer follows the grotesque pattern of your own, and ours is without passion. You can see that ninety per cent of your sin is already gone.

"What else is left to us? What other opportunity — if that is the word for it — have we for sinning? We have no poverty, no greed, no envy. Our metabolism is so regulated that neither sloth nor hysterical activity is possible. We have long ago attained a balance in all things; and 'sin' is only a form of unbalance.

"I have forgotten, little priest. What are the 'sins' of the childish races?"

"Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth. These are the capital sins and the sources of sin. All others derive from them."

"Spoken like a valiant little mime. And nothing can be derived but from a source. But you can see how we completely lack these seven stumbling blocks of children. Pride is only a misunderstanding of the nature of achievement; Covetousness disappears when all that could be coveted has been acquired; Lust is an adjunct to an arrangement that no longer has a counterpart in ourselves. Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth are only malfunctions. All malfunctions are subject to corrections; and we have corrected them.

Padreco Barnaby was defeated for the while, and he let his mind wander. He gazed over the countryside of Analos.

An early explorer has given his impression of that world: "It was as though I were walking under water," he wrote. "This was not from any obstruction or resistance, for the atmosphere is lighter than Earth's. It was from a sort of shimmering and wavering of the air itself, and from the 'air shadows' — not clouds — that pass along like the running shadows of overhead waves. This, coupled with the floral (very like the underwater plants of Earth, though free-standing), gave me the feeling that I was walking on the bottom of an ocean."

To the Padreco it seemed as though he had been talking under water, and that he had not been heard.

"What is the meaning of that giant kettle in the center of your main plaza, Landmaster?" he finally asked. "It seems quite old."

"It is a relic of our old race, and we keep it. We have a certain reverence for the past. Even the obsoleted past."

"Then it has a present use?"

"No. But under a special condition we could revert to an ancient use of it. That need not concern you now."

A kettle, a giant kettle! You have no idea how grotesquely potbellied the monstrous thing was.

But the Padreco returned impotently to his main theme.

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"There has to be sin, Landmaster! How else could there be Salvation?"

"We have Salvation, little priest. You haven't. How could you bring it to us?"

So Padreco Barnaby left Landmaster, and went out to see if he could not discover sin somewhere on Analos. He asked a small boy about it.

"Sonny, do you know what sin is? Have you ever run across the thing?"

"Sir and stranger, sin is an archaic word for an outmoded thing. It is an appurtenance to an unclarified state of mind that still obtains on the more benighted worlds. The word and the concept behind it will pass into oblivion as soon as true light can be brought into those dark places."

Damnation! — a meaningless word on Analos — even the children of the gargoyles were too polite to be human.

"You little monster, do all the children on Analos talk like that?" the Padreco asked the boy.

"All who are not deviationists would of necessity talk as I do. And 'Monster', as you call me with disapprobation, means a 'showpiece' — that which is displayed, a wonder. The late meaning of the word in the sense of a grotesque animal is an accretion. I gladly accept the name of monster in its true meaning. We are the Monsters of the Universe."

"Damme, I believe you are," he said, and to himself, "Polyglot little prig!" He couldn't even cope with the children of the things.

"Sonny, do you ever have any fun?" he finally asked.

"Fun is another archaic word, but I am not sound on the meaning of it," said the boy. "Is it not related to the obsolete concept of sin?"

"Not directly, boy. Fun is the third side of a two-sided coin. It slips in. Or it used to."

"Sir and stranger, it is possible that you should take a course in corrective semantics."

"I may be taking one now. But what of the children who *are* deviationists? Where are they, and what are they like?"

"I don't know. If they don't pass their probationary period we don't see them any more. I believe they are sent to another place."

"I have to find a little bit of sin somewhere," the Padreco mumbled to himself. "An honest man should be able to find it anywhere if he really inquires. On Earth the saying was that a taxi-driver would always know where."

The Padreco hailed a taxi. A taxi is a circle. That is to say that one clambers over and sits in the single circular seat that faces inward. The Analoi are gregarious and like to gaze on the faces of their fellows. Only the shame-capable humans would wish to sit in unfacing rows. The driver sits above in an open turret, and dangles his head down to talk.

"Where would you go, stranger?" the driver asked Padreco Barnaby. There was one other passenger, a thoughtful-seeming man of early middle age.

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"I'm looking for sin," the Padreco told the driver. "It's a tradition that taxi-drivers always know where to find it."

"Riddles, is it, stranger? Let me deliver my other customer while I puzzle that one out. It's his last ride, and that makes it important."

"How is it your last ride?" Padreco Barnaby asked the thoughtful man. Conversation was unavoidable in such a taxi. The facing was too direct to get out of it.

"Oh, my time has come," said the man. "A little earlier than with most. I've drunk the cup empty, so there's nothing left. It was a nice life. Well, I suppose that it was. Rather expected more out of it somehow; but I see now that I shouldn't have. An adult will know when it's over. And they do make a clean end of it for you."

"Deus meus! Is that the way it ends on Analos?"

"How else? Natural death has been pushed back so far that nobody could contemplate waiting for it. Should we drag out our lives and become abridged repetitious creatures like the lesser races? One goes quietly when he realizes that he has covered it all."

"But that is despair!"

"A little boy's word for a little boy's thing. Termination with Dignity — that's the only way. Good-by to you both. And to all."

The thoughtful man got out and entered the Terminators.

"Now what was the name of that thing you wanted to be taken to, stranger?" the taxi-driver asked the Padreco.

"Never mind. I may have found it already. I'll walk back."

There was something here that needed a name.

He walked till he came again to the buildings of the city, and the buildings distorted as he neared them. The buildings of Analos seem bulbous at near view, and indeed they are built slightly so. Yet when seen at a distance — due to a vagary of the atmosphere called 'Towering' by Earth meteorologists — they appear normal and straight. The few buildings built to Earth specifications seem pinched-in at a distance, almost collapsing on themselves. But as he came back to the City, the potbellied aspect of the buildings made the Padreco feel a complete alien. He was lost in this world, and he cried out:

"Oh, for the old familiar sins that one can get hold of and denounce! In my book, termination is not the only way; and dignity has another meaning. Where are the people who sin like people? Is there nowhere a healthy case of d.t.'s, or a hoppy in need of reform? Is there no burglar I can call my brother? No golden-hearted chippy who needs only be shown the right way? Is there here no thief or usurer or politician to strike a note of reality? Hypocrites, wife-beaters, seducers, demagogues, sleazy old perverters, where can I find you? Answer me! I need you now!"

"Sir, sir, you are crying out in the street," a young Analoi lady told him. "Are you ill? What are you calling out for?"

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"Sin. A little sin, please, for the love of Christ. If there is no sin in my cellar, then the foundation of my house is not what I believed."

"Hardly anyone uses sin any more, sir. What a peculiar thing to be crying out for in the street! But I believe there is one shop that still handles it. Here. I will write you the address."

Padreco Barnaby took the address and ran to the shop. But it was not what he sought. Sin was the old name of a scent, but the name had been changed.

There were very many of these scent shops. Too many. And the scent of the scent shops was not the odor of sanctity. Was it possible that a new sensuality had taken the place of the old?

And the other shops — block after block of them. What were they for? What were the uses of the strange apparatuses displayed in them? And why should they give that sticky feeling of menace?

The Padreco spent a long day wandering through the capital city of Analos. The pavements were green, and artfully shadow-painted so as to resemble turf. The effect, however, was not that of placid nature. It was of a primordial wildness able to break through the thin shell at any time. And what was the new weirdness that came over him when he walked through the parks? The earlier explorer had been mistaken. The plants of Analos do not resemble the undersea plants of Earth; they resemble the undersea animals. They leer like devilfish, and grin like tigersharks.

It was here everywhere, but it had changed its name.

It was with shameful triumph that Padreco Barnaby first uncovered the sweeping outlines of the thing; it was with growing horror that he amassed the details. When he had enough of it, he went back to Landmaster, who was now with several others of his kind.

"Repent! Repent!" the Padreco called to them. "The axe is already laid to the roots. The tree that bears evil fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire!"

"Of what should we repent, little priest?" Landmaster asked.

"Of your sins. At once! Before it is too late!"

"I have explained to you that we have no sins, little priest; and that we could not have according to our developed nature. Your repetition would annoy us — if we ever let anything annoy us."

Landmaster made a sign to one of his fellows, who left them at once.

"What were the rather humorous names you gave them this morning?" Landmaster asked, turning again to the priest.

"You remember the names I gave. Now I give them others. Too effete for the ancient sins themselves, you have the deadly shadows of them; Presumption, Establishment, Ruthlessness, Selfishness, Satiety, Monopoly, Despair."

"An interesting argument. We have a Department of Interesting Arguments. You should go there and have it recorded."

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"I will record it here! You practice Infanticide, Juvenicide, Senectucide, Suicide."

"Yes, the gentle terminators."

"You murder your own children who do not measure up to your atrocious norm."

"Judicious selection."

"You have invented new lusts and perversions."

"Refined amusement."

"There are the evil who are evil openly. There are the evil who hide their evil and deny that they are venomous. There are the ultimate in evil — who keep the venom, and change the Name of the Snake!"

"I'm happy that we're the ultimate," said Landmaster. "We would be affronted by a lesser classification."

Padreco Barnaby paused and raised his head.

"I smell wood burning," he said suddenly. "You no longer use wood for fuel here."

"In one case only," said Landmaster. "An ancient and seldom employed ritual of ours."

"Which?"

"You do not understand, little priest? Ten million Earth cartoons of the thing, and still you do not understand. What is the unvarying fate of the Missioner on the Savage Shore?"

"You are not supposed to be savage!"

"We revert, little priest. In this one case we revert. It is our ancient answer to the obstreperous Missioner who persists in asking us the irksome question. We cannot allow ourselves to be irked."

Padreco Barnaby couldn't believe it. Even when they put him in the monstrous kettle he couldn't believe it. They were setting the long tables for the feast, and surely it was all a mistake.

"Landmaster! You people, you creatures can't be serious!"

"Why no, little priest. This is a comical affair. Why should we be serious? Do you not think it comical that the Missioner should be boiled in a pot?"

"No! No! It's ghastly!"

This had to be a dream — an underwater nightmare.

"Why did you make ten million comical cartoons of the thing if you didn't find it comic?"

"I didn't make them. Yes, I did — two of them, when I was a seminarian, and for our own little pubication. Landmaster! The water is hellish hot!"

"Are we magicians that we can boil a man in cold water?"

"Not — not shoes and all?" the Padreco gasped. That seemed to be the ultimate outrage.

"Shoes and all, little priest. We like the flavor. What was your own favorite caption for the race-memory cartoon, Padreco?"

"You can't do this to me!!!"

"Yes, that was a good one. But that was the subscript, as I remember it, and the caption was 'Famous Last Words'. However my own favorite, while it concerns anthropophagi, did not concern a Missioner. It was the cannibal chief who said 'My wife makes a fine soup. I'll miss her.' What is your favorite, Shareshuffler?"

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Shareshuffler had a great two-tined fork, and he stuck it into Padreco Barnaby to see if he was done yet. The Padreco was far from done, and the clamor he set up made it impossible to hear Shareshuffler's own favorite among the Kettle Jokes. This is a loss, for it was one of the best of them all.

How loud that man was about the carrying out of an ancient custom!

"A lobster doesn't make such a noise when he's boiled," chided Landmaster. "An oyster doesn't, and a Xtlecnutlico doesn't. Why should a man make such a noise? It would be irritating to us — if we let anything irritate us."

But they didn't, nothing at all. They were too developed a race to allow themselves to be irritated.

When he was finally done, thy had him out of the kettle and polished him off. They dealt in the prescribed manner with an ancient menace, and had a superb feast out of it too.

The Analoi weren't quite what they seemed. They had hid from themselves, and dealt in shadows instead of things. They had even changed the name of their nature — but they hadn't changed their nature.

But on occasion they could still revert. They could stage an old-time, red-blooded, slumgullion-slurping, bone-gnawing dangeroo of a feast. Men and monsters, they did have one now! Citizens, that Padreco had good stuff in him!

END

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Coming . . . Tomorrow!

Next issue, two of your favorite writers — and ours — are back, each with a complete short novel that marks them at the top of their form.

Leading off the issue is a complete short novel by Gordon R. Dickson called *On Messenger Mountain*. It's a high-pitched adventure yarn dealing with a far planet, a wrecked spaceship crew who need — desparately! — to get off a signal calling for help . . . and a rather annoying alien who insists on trying to take part in their activities.

And Philip K. Dick, who wrote *All We Marsmen* and much else that has been good about recent science fiction, gives us a grisly and thought-stirring look at a world in which the "dear departed" don't necessarily quite depart. Sometimes they stay around — to everyone's regret! The title of this one is *What the Dead Men Say* . . . and, as you will see, they say a lot!

Of course there's more — a *lot* more. We're hoping you'll be with us next issue to read it . . .

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UNDER THE GADDYL

BY C. C. MacAPP

ILLUSTRATED BY MORROW

Earth was beaten, enslaved. To touch a Gaddyl was death — even to save its life!

I

Murno had heard the tracking-cry of the breloons in the uneasy hours before dawn, signifying almost certainly another slave-escape. He was very careful getting from his cottage to the look-out tree.

The spring morning was clear. From his vantage-point on the third or fourth highest hill in the east side of the bay (naturally he avoided the highest) he could see across to the narrow bay entrance called, for some reason, the golden gate. He squinted, trying to count the black dots in the sky over the big mountain north of the golden gate, where the Gaddyl city was. There

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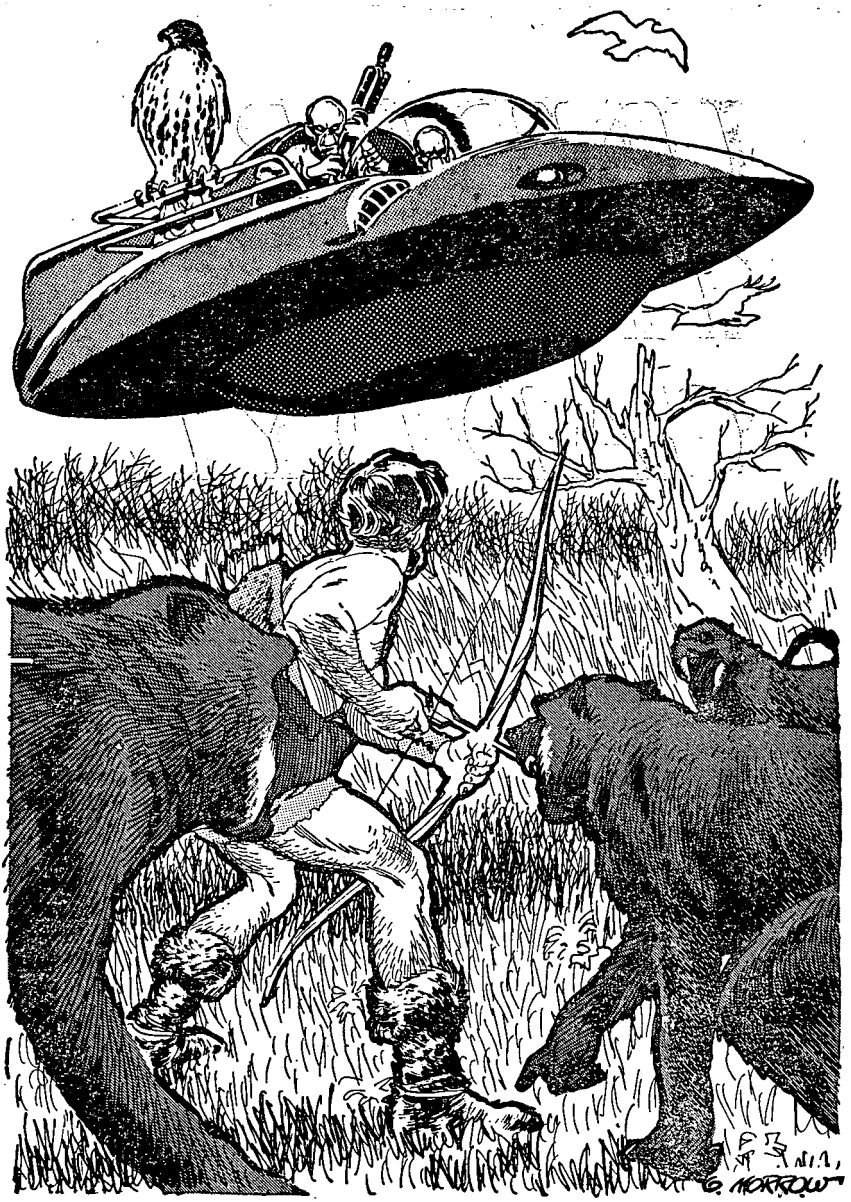

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were always grav cars aloft, but today it seemed to him there were more than usual.

South of the golden gate, he could make out the few shards of ruins which legend said had once been a city of his own people. Closer, on the bay itself, were sails and wakes which would be Gaddyl sporting parties. Above this shore of the bay, gulls circled in updrafts and ducks darted toward their feeding-grounds. There were no geehawks, either there or in any other part of the sky that he could see. Unless the escaped slave (or whatever the quarry was) had gotten improbably far, that meant the hunt was over.

Solid forest spread below him to the near shore of the bay. The breloons, so far as he'd been able to judge from the sounds — his cottage was on the other side of the line of hills — had tracked north through that forest. The escape, then, had occurred not far south of here, probably on the shore of the bay. Possibly from a Gaddyl fishing party, or a scientific expedition, out overnight. The escapee hadn't showed much cleverness, running north along fairly level ground.

Murno examined the sky to the north. Suddenly his eyes fixed. Above the sloping high ground that hid the north arm of the bay, black dots almost too tiny to see moved in slow circles. He watched them, and knew they were vultures.

He considered the terrain between. With any kind of caution, it would take him three hours to get there. He didn't like to start without letting his family know, but to go back to the cottage first would add another two hours to the trip; and there were reasons why it might be vital for him to know quickly what had happened.

He let himself down quietly through the branches, trying not to stir up too much fuss among the birds and squirrels. Before dropping to the ground he took a pair of bearskin boots from a hiding place and pulled them on over his moccassins.

He made for a gully where there was enough bear sign, and enough bear scent, to fool the breloons. He went down it to where it joined another which had a small creek. Here he hid the boots again and went up the freshet until it was too scant to be useful. Then he climbed openly up the last slope and went along the line of hills. If he were intercepted now, he'd just have to say he was hunting. A freed man was permitted that.

When he was about opposite where he'd seen the vultures, he stopped to listen. Things sounded all right. He heard a she-bear go by with two cubs, and caught glimpses of them through the underbrush. Nothing was following them.

He started down the gentle slope, trying not to leave visible tracks. The ground was thick with leaves and pine needles, but very wet and spongy because the slope wasn't steep enough for good drainage. Legend said the climate had been drier before the Gaddyl came and altered it. Legend said many confusing things.

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When he could hear the vulture feeding, he reconnoitered very carefully and found a clump of brush from which he could see.

It was an escaped slave, all right; a non-mutated human, male and young. His last moments hadn't been pleasant. In the first place, the breloons—mutated from baboons for better long-distance running, better scent-tracking, more size and viciousness—had torn him up pretty badly. Then the Gaddyl had stripped off his clothes, tied his hands behind him, administered a few odd blows and hung him by the feet from a tree-limb. He was only an arm's length from the ground, where even canines could get at him. He'd had the choice of hanging head-down or trying to raise his head by bending at the waist and neck.

He'd apparently bled to death from his small wounds, and now the vultures were making do with him . . . though they'd undoubtedly have preferred him riper.

Murno retreated, very carefully. The manner of execution was significant. It had probably been intended as bait.

Bait implied something to trap.

There were two possibilities. First, there might be other escapees who could have tried to rescue the dying man. Second—and this concerned Murno—the Gaddyl might suspect that freed men in the area had been helping escapees.

He went away from the place with all the art he knew, in a direction which was not the one he intended to take finally. He reached a stream and waded it for a while. Then he constructed several trail-puzzles and went over a ridge to another stream.

Well into the afternoon he emerged on the east side of the first line of hills, in his own valley. He went openly again, wading through knee-high grass, paralleling the small stream that led past his cottage. Something scurried from before him and plopped into the water. Probably a muskrat.

A few minutes later he stopped, crouching. The birds were too quiet.

II

The breloons came from two sides; out of the willow thicket along the creek, and down the slope to his right. He was cut off before he saw them, but anyway it would have been suicide to run. They closed to a ring, trampling down the grass so they'd have better mobility in case of action. Then they squatted, showing him their three-inch fangs. He knew they hoped he'd give them an excuse to tear him to bits. He stood relaxed, turning his head slowly to look around. There were no geehawks in the air. That meant the Gaddyl were near, and had called the birds in.

Two grav cars came over the hills a few feet above the trees. Weapons that could flash searing death pointed at him. Each car was driven by a mutant-human and bore a single Gaddyl. The geehawks—bigger than eagles; mutated for better night vision and higher intelligence and a willingness to work with the breloons—perched on the rails.

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Murno knew both the aliens.

The cars hovered a few feet away. Murno looked back as calmly as he could at the unreadable faces. Finally the older one spoke, his voice harsh but with an undertone of humor, as Murno remembered it. "It has been many years, freed man."

Murno inclined his head. "Many years, my lord."

The younger alien said something in the Gaddyl tongue, and the other answered. The younger spoke in English. "So you are Murno."

"Yes, young sir."

"I am told you touched me."

A small sickness of fear began to grow in Murno's stomach. He answered as meekly as he could, "It was unavoidable, my lord. You were too young to run, and the jeel was almost upon us."

"I have heard the story. I am not flattered by it. Do you know you are the only unmutated human who has ever touched a Gaddyl and been pardoned?"

Anger added itself to Murno's fear, but he kept his manner humble. "I know that, young sir." He thought it best not to add that it was more than he'd expected at the time.

"A foolish decision on my father's part," Prince Guddun said. "Oory here—" nodding toward the older alien—"thinks I should be grateful that you saved my life. That also is foolish. Between Gaddyl and slave there can be no such feelings. There is no common plane of existence. Do you understand that?"

Though more than twenty years had passed, the agonizing moment of dilemma was vivid in Murno's memory. He could have sneaked away and let the jeel kill the alien child. There would have been no way to trace him to the spot. To touch the child, much less pick it up and run with it, was automatically punishable by death.

He did not think he would make the same decision today, even though Fief Kokiel had broken the precedent, pardoned him, and given him his freedom. What he said now was, "I understand, young sir."

Though the Gaddyl face could not smile, a note of amusement entered Guddun's voice. He tapped his driver's hairless head with his knuckles. "This one knows his place. You. Have you heard the story of how Murno saved me?"

"I have heard, master."

"What would you have done in his place?"

"It is not forbidden for my class to touch Gaddyl, master."

"Of course not, fool. Suppose you were a non-mutant like Murno. Would you have saved me?"

"Of course, master."

"And you would not think it unfair to be executed for touching me?"

"No, master."

Guddun turned to Oory. "You see? This slave has more sense than you have." He turned back to Murno. "Where have you been today?"

"Hunting, young sir, beyond those hills."

"Is that bow your only weapon?"

"Except for the knife, young sir."

"What were you hunting?"

"I thought I might take a young hog, my lord."

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"And did you?"

"No, young sir."

"Did you know there were runaway slaves on this side of the bay?"

Murno knew he had to answer carefully. "I heard the chase last night, and this morning I saw vultures to the north. I guessed a runaway might have been caught."

"And that's all you know?"

Now he must lie. "We freed men take pains to avoid such affairs, my lord."

"You had better. How many freed men live within a day's walk out of here?"

"Not more than thirty families. Mine is the only hut in this valley."

"We saw it from the air. Now, I want to remind you of one condition of your freedom. If at any time you should encounter a runaway, you are to capture him alive if possible and bring him to us. If that is not possible, you are to kill him and bring us his head. You understand that?"

"I do, young sir."

"And you have not forgotten the penalties?"

"I have not."

Guddun turned away contemptuously and said something to Oory, who shouted an order to the breloons. The beasts broke their circle, reluctantly, and bobbed across the valley toward the western slope in their odd gait. The cars followed. The geehawks took to the air and flapped ponderously for altitude. The hunt was evidently going to continue along the top of the hills, or on the bay side; or at least they wanted Murno to think so.

Oory looked back at once, and if Murno could read anything in his attitude, he was apologetic. He was chief-at-arms to Fief Kokiel; and like the Fief he was decent, within the relationship of master to slaves. That he flew with the Fief's son did not augur well. For all Murno knew, old Kokiel might already be dead.

Guddun was not going to be a tolerant overlord.

That such lofty persons should be involved in the hunt at all implied something serious. Possibly they were in this area because Oory knew most of the freed men.

Murno resumed his hike, pondering the implications. The hunt was still on, and that was trouble enough, with breloons loose in the country. What worried him even more was that Guddun had deliberately let him see that the hunt was still on. He couldn't think of any explanation he liked.

The sun was behind the hills when he got home. The window-shutters were closed, and his wife Klayr did not unbar the door until he was within a few steps. She put her arms around him and buried her face against his shoulder, in silent relief. The youngsters did not leave their lookout spots at the windows, but watched him with grave eyes.

"There were grav cars," Klayr said, drawing back from him, "and we heard breloons up in the hills."

"I met them," he said. "Were the hawks flying?"

She nodded.

"They pulled them down, then, when they spotted me," he said. "At

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least one slave must have gotten away without leaving a trail."

"Oh, I hope he stays away from here," she said. "I can't help feeling that way."

"Well," he said, "there's one of them, at least, that won't bother us." He told about the body. "The other, or others, are probably holed up somewhere. They won't move until it rains, unless they get too hungry."

Gaje, the boy, who was eleven, said, "Pa. I think there are some hawks, way up."

Murno went and knelt beside the cracks in the shutter. There were birds of some kind, not directly overhead but a little way north. Their undersides were pale in the setting sun. "Might be," he said. "Anyway, we'll have to stay in. Got enough wood and water?"

"We got it in this morning," Gaje said.

Later, while Klayr worked patiently with an awl, putting tiny perforations in some buckskin that would be used for garments, and Gaje helped his nine-year-old sister practice her writing, Murno puttered with some arrows and thought over and over the situation.

The first breloons he'd heard in the night had been perhaps an hour behind their quarry, because it would have taken a good fraction of an hour to get them here and put them on a trail. Say, the break had been a little after midnight. If the fugitives had been sensible enough to separate immediately after helping each other past the electronic safeguards around the camp, some could have gone southeast through the mud and tules along the bay. If so, they must have found a stream and gone up it into the hills before daylight. That meant they could be within a few miles of here.

He couldn't understand why the young one had run straight north, without even trying to lose the trail in one of the creeks he'd crossed, unless—possibly—he'd been deliberately decoying pursuit.

Long after the candles were out Murno lay awake, unable to rid himself of the feeling that something bigger was afoot than just tracking down a runaway or two. Possibly Guddun wanted some excuse to round up all the freed men and reenslave them.

It was not easy to contemplate pulling up roots and leaving this comfortable spot; the fine cottage he'd built over the years and the vegetable patches around it. Not the least of the advantages here was that he knew these hills almost to the individual tree. Another was that the Gaddyl sportsmen hunted the area clear of dangerous animals. There weren't too many other places a freed man could settle a family safely. Most of Kalf was wild. The Gaddyl, webtoed water-lovers, almost amphibian, kept to the coast and to a few inland lakes at low altitudes, except when they were out after wild game.

Most of the fiefdoms would not tolerate freed men around their holdings. There was one fiefdom, two hundred miles north and a hundred miles inland, on the lake called shas tah, that kept a stretch of coun-

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try hunted safe, and tolerated freed men. Murno knew the way there, across the northern arm of the bay and up a river called the sack one, because he'd helped more than one fugitive along the first half of the way. But it was a wild trip and a dangerous one.

He decided that, willing or not, he'd better get out of here while he could. He'd go as soon as this hunt was over.

That decision made, he rolled over and tried to sleep. It was just as well that he wasn't able to, for he might have missed the slapping sounds from the creek.

It was a noise a raccoon or muskrat might have made, but the pattern was a pre-arranged one that meant a neighbor calling. He got out of bed quietly and went to the rear window. He eased the shutters open a crack. He was aware of the family coming awake behind him.

In two or three minutes the sounds were repeated.

He listened for a full minute for hawks' wings, then said quietly, "Who?"

The answer was just as low, the words spaced so hawks would not recognize human speech. "Joe. Kenth's boy. Bad trouble."

The sick feeling that had been with Murno ever since meeting Guddun intensified. Kenth lived in the next valley to the east, and farther south. That he'd sent his twelve-year-old like this meant trouble indeed. Murno stood for a minute in an agony of indecision. Then he said, "Can you wait there?"

"Hurry," said Joe. Murno could hear the distress in his voice.

Murno whispered to the family, "Get the deerskins and the other things. We're leaving, the way we practiced."

The boy got the deerskins and some other items while Sis and Klayr gathered food and clothing. Murno saw to the tools and weapons, and looped two lengths of braided horsehide rope around himself. The gathering didn't take long.

The way out was through a wood bin that had an open end. Murno went first, easing halfway out on hands and knees, and stopping in the deep shadow against the wall. He felt Gaje's touch on his ankle. He listened for sounds from the creek. There were some deer a ways upstream; not as close as he would have liked; but they would have to do.

Trying to make it just loud enough, he produced a cougar sound. The deer stopped wading and were very still. He made the sound again and they bolted from the water, their soft hoofbeats diminishing toward the north.

The hawks, if any, would gather above the fleeing deer for a minute. The tiny telltale radios they wore would register their gathering, but when they dispersed again it would be ignored.

He went back toward the creek, on all fours, bending his legs so his back would be horizontal. The hawks weren't bright enough to recognize people with deerskins over their backs, in the dim light, if the people moved like deer.

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He got to the willows and waited for the family to catch up. He heard Joe wading toward him. "Kenth?" he said.

"Took slave north," Joe said.

"Family?"

"Gone warm others." Joe felt for Murno's hand in the darkness, placed something heavy in it. "Gun."

Murno stood stunned. Any bit of Gaddyl technology that could be spirited away was priceless. A handgun, with its compact energy source and the mechanism that generated the scorching death-bolts, was a theft frightening to contemplate.

Now he understood why the hunt was so serious. He understood, too, the sacrifice of the young slave who'd run north.

There was no question at all now of staying near the bay. All the freed men and their families, or such of them as got the warning, would scatter.

It was a terrible responsibility to have the gun. More than likely, Kenth hadn't even told Joe where to take it; didn't even want to know in whose hands it wound up. Murno hesitated, wrestling with the unwelcome thought that his own family didn't count now. But they'd heard Joe's low words; it was too late to spare them the knowledge. It would surely be dragged from them if they were caught. For that reason, as well as his own selfish ones, he couldn't let them be caught.

By morning the Gaddyl would know that a general flight was on. There'd be plenty of trails for the breloons to sniff out. Murno's immediate problem was to gain several hours.

He led the way upstream, under the willows, then away from the creek and up the eastern slope, single file and on all fours as deers would move. Among the trees he headed north and over the hill to the next valley. There was no sense in trying to avoid leaving a trail here. He'd just as soon have it look as if he were heading for the northern arm of the bay, where it narrowed. He had to move fast now, but when he'd gained a little distance he would confuse the trail.

He reached a creek he knew and turned south with it, wading now and carrying Sis. When the creek bent back to the northeast he knew he was near the tributary he wanted.

It was not much more than a trickle, coming down a steep canyon, but the brush was very thick along both sides. At a spot where it was almost, but not quite, impenetrable he forced a way up the right-hand slope.

The pines were dense here, except for a rocky outcropping in one place that was overgrown with wild blackberries. This was one of the places he'd planned on for emergencies. The trouble with it was that it was not handy to any place a person might want to flee to. That was an advantage too, of course, and so was the difficult way he'd come. With luck, they could hole up here until it rained.

He got the others settled among the rocks, not without a few scratches from the vines, but well hidden.

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Sis went to sleep at once, too tired even to eat. The rest of them ate and made the best beds they could. Now there was nothing to do but wait, and think.

The only way he knew that any fugitives had ever escaped was up the sack toe river. There was another river, called the san wah keen, that emptied into the same strait; but all he knew about it was that it came from eastward and that the lower stretches of it, beyond the marshes, flowed through a wide bottomland swarming with game, some of it dangerous. It would be searched anyway, at least for a few miles upstream.

To the south, the local range of hills shrank to unwooded grassy knolls before joining a respectable range of mountains farther south. Even if it were possible to get across the open stretches, he'd be in strange mountains where, so far as he knew, no humans lived. And there was the Gaddyl fiefdom on the coast, a hundred miles south of this one. Now that a weapon had been stolen, they'd all band together in the search.

If he couldn't go north, and couldn't go south, and couldn't stay here—these hills would be thoroughly combed once the escape routes were cut—he'd have to go east.

East meant into the sack toe valley, which was almost like saying there was no place to go. When he'd been a slave, he'd flown out over it twice with hunting parties. It was flat, dotted with oaks and scored with waterways, but mostly open grassland. Neither of the two parties had seen any lions, but he'd seen pelts brought back by others. Sometimes even Gaddyl hunters failed to return from the sack toe valley.

That much he knew about it first-hand. There were tales, passed from slave to slave, that one could believe or not. The valley was claimed to be almost a hundred miles across, and three or four hundred from north to south. Beyond the eastern edge there were said to be mountains so high they dwarfed anything on this side; so high the air grew thin and cold, and unmelting snow lay in awesome masses, as ancient as the land itself. In those mountains, the tales said, lived hostile men—not freed men or escaped slaves, but humans who had never been conquered, and who dreamed the preposterous dream of someday warring upon the Gaddyl. An old neighbor of Murno's, now dead, had whispered it about that any instrument that could be stolen from the Gaddyl ought to be taken to those free men.

Murno toyed with the thought.

But he didn't even know whether the story was true. And if one were to believe the tales, those far mountains were not accessible; for in the foothills this side of them dwelt a mysterious and terrible race called the Blue Mutants, whom even the Gaddyl did not hunt.

Murno was not given to pondering excessively such myths. He was concerned with the practical question of whether it was possible to survive in the sack toe valley itself. One thing he did know; it was big enough and wild enough to hide in.

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After breakfast he climbed a tree that gave him a fair view to the west.

There was smoke over the hills, which he took to mean that freed men's cottages had burned during the night. There were geehawks, high and scattered, and a few grav cars that rose into sight above the trees occasionally. The hunt seemed to be localized in the valleys where the freed men had lived, but was spreading in this direction.

Such a leisurely hunt here implied that the Gaddyl felt they had the escape routes sealed, which was about what Murno had expected. They'd undoubtedly turned up his own trail, and followed it to the dead end by now, where he'd entered the creek. That didn't matter.

There were clouds, white on the southern horizon, but no wind here. Usually, if it rained on a day like this, it was late in the afternoon when the wind picked up, bringing clouds from the southwest. If it didn't rain, he couldn't move tonight; and he thought the chances of being found would go up sharply tomorrow.

Later in the day, hawks began to move in his direction. It looked as if they were on a definite trail, sweeping ahead of breloons. He made sure everyone was under cover. He began to worry when the birds concentrated, about where he'd left the creek to come up this tributary. In a little while he was sure they had a human in view. Then he saw a grav car. It dipped below the trees out of sight, probably landing a new shift of breloons.

Now he heard the beasts take up their cry, on a warm trail. They were coming this way, and fast. The hawks wheeled suddenly, in unison, and dropped below the trees. Now he heard their harsh shrieks. So did the breloons, and a little later he knew the breloons had the quarry in sight too. The chase came right up his own path. He began to sweat, thinking that if the quarry lost them even for a few seconds, they'd nose around and pick up Murno's trail.

But the chase went on by, higher. The fleeing man was probably trying to get on top of the hill, hoping to find another stream and outrun the beasts downhill. It was hopeless, of course, and the quarry must have realized it, for he stopped abruptly. Murno could hear his gasping breath and see the hawks making little dives at him, screaming their bloodthirsty screams. Murno could picture the man, backed into some corner of the ravine, knife ready.

The breloons bellowed out their sighting-call, then went silent. They'd be moving to surround the victim. Now the man began to curse them and snarl like a desperate animal. The trouble was, they wouldn't give him a chance to use the knife.

The grav car came into sight, so close Murno could almost look into the Gaddyl's eyes. He shrank down closer to his rock. The weapon spat, and the doomed man screamed awfully. Probably they'd shot off the hand holding the knife.

The breloons dove in. It was almost worse hearing the awful strug-

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gle than seeing it. Then the Gaddyl shouted the breloons off, and the din quieted. There remained the victim's panting and low moans, the subdued snarls of the breloons, and the swish of wings.

The Gaddyl voices spilled out the queer alien language. Murno understood enough to know they were debating whether to load the dying man and question him in the air, or do it here.

A smaller car came up the ravine, and its rider settled the question. He ordered the others to get the man aboard, and the breloons; which were needed elsewhere. Murno sagged with relief. If the beasts had been allowed to nose back down the ravine, they'd have surely turned up his own track.

The cars left; the hawks flapped for altitude and flew west.

Murno, sick and sweating, wondered who the man had been. He hadn't recognized the voice.

IV

The wind came before sundown, and on its heels the rain.

He rousted the family up and took them over the top of the hill and down the other side. He knew there were no bad slopes in this direction, and going in a straight line was best. The slant of the rain helped him keep his directions. Their trail would be washed out before morning.

After about three hours the general slope was definitely to the east. He'd only been here a few times, and couldn't rely on memory; he had to grope his way along. The nature of the trees began to change. He could smell oak, mixed in with the pine, and sometimes feel its harsh leaves.

They descended the last hill and went on down a very mild slope. This was where the watch would be set up, to keep everyone bottled into the local range of hills. He had to get past it while the rain held.

When it began to slack off, and the wind to die, he thought he'd better stop until the first light, else he might lose his directions. They were in short grass now, among scattered oaks. They huddled under one, ate, and got what rest they could. In about an hour he could tell which way was east, and went on.

The rain was only a sporadic drizzle now, so as soon as he could see he looked for a place to hide during the day. Beyond that he could not plan.

A little way to the right was a shallow ravine where the oaks grew thick. He headed for it. There was no permanent stream there, he found, but there was enough rainwater now to kill the trail. He looked back, and judged the hills were about four miles behind. It ought to do.

He found two oaks that bracketed the water and joined leaves overhead. He kept the family standing in a pool while he climbed one tree and made a rope fast, and tossed the free end across to the other tree. He climbed the other tree and tied that end.

The rope was long enough for a

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second strand, about four feet above the first. Now it would be possible to get from one tree to the other, walking on the lower strand and holding to the upper, and — what was more important — to get from the rope into the water. He hung a shorter rope, with knots along it, from the upper strand, and helped the family up. He had to distribute them between the two trees to get them all hidden. With luck, and care, neither breloons nor hawks would spot them unless they happened very close.

He'd stopped here instead of going a little farther because, a few hundred yards ahead, a dense line of trees marked some waterway. He didn't want to take the family there before scouting.

He told Gaje and Joe, "Take the two biggest deerskins and the rest of this rope, and make a hammock for the women. Sling it where it won't be seen, but tie it to big limbs that won't shake. All right?"

He had Gaje follow him out onto the ropes and pull up the hanging one. He said, "I should be back within two hours; but if I have to be longer for some reason, don't stir out of these trees before sundown." Klayr obviously wasn't happy about his going, but she didn't protest.

He kept to the water and thought he wasn't leaving any trail. He paused near the thicket, studying it. There were trees something like elms, pretty well leafed now and taller than oaks. Willows grew beneath them in a nearly solid mass. There were a few game trails. He saw no deer tracks, but there were some hoofmarks, not too new, that horses might have made. He could smell tules.

He went in cautiously, then waited. There was nothing suspicious.

He spent an hour scouting the creek, which was small and not very fast, even with last night's rain. Maybe the rain hadn't amounted to much this side of the hills. He found tracks of raccoons, muskrats, bobcats, foxes and skunks. Birds were already feeding their young. He saw no disturbing signs. Still, he was glad he'd stopped short of the creek because it flowed north, and undoubtedly would join the san wah keen. A search might come up it on general principles.

There were fish, and he thought he might bring one of the boys back late in the afternoon and catch a few if no trouble showed up during the day. They could gather birds' eggs, too. The trouble was, he wouldn't dare make a fire. He guessed they'd have to learn to eat things raw. The cooked food they had would only last one more day.

He went back to the family.

The sky had cleared, and as he expected there were geehawks and cars along the edge of the hills. They kept up the patrol all day. Now and then the cars made sorties out over the open land, the birds taking the cue. A few passed over Murno's two trees. They concentrated briefly once a little way south, but it was apparently only some animal.

There was no search up the

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creek to the east. Murno would rather have had one, since he could have crossed behind it with some hope that it wouldn't be repeated right away. As it was, he hardly dared cross until it rained again. He hoped that would be tonight. It was far from comfortable sleeping in an oak tree; and, so close to the bay, the Gaddyl might find them by blind luck.

Before sundown the hawks were called in and it looked as if the cars landed to pick up breloons. Half an hour later, other cars appeared and sent out a new shift of hawks.

When the sun nudged the hills, he took Joe to the creek. Flies were settling on tree-trunks and tules for the night, and it was easy to stun them with a soft piece of leather. The fish took them as fast as they could be tossed in. It didn't take long to hook a dozen. They were sunfish, none over five inches long, but adequate. They cleaned them over the creek and rinsed them. There was no use in catching more; they wouldn't keep.

Murno had spotted several nests that would be easy to reach, and now he sent Joe shinnying up for eggs. "Don't take them all," he said. "Leave two or three in each nest."

Before they started back, he said to Joe, "You haven't asked any questions, but I guess you can see you may have to stay with us for a while."

Joe met his eyes. "You don't have to try to sugar-coat it for me. I know I won't likely see my family again, even if they do get away."

"I'm glad you can take it like a man," Murno said. "I don't see how we can help it. We're going to be lucky to come through this ourselves." He paused. There wasn't much more to be said about that. "We can't have a fire, you know. The women might not take to raw fish and eggs very well. I thought I'd let them have my share of the cooked stuff."

"Sure," said Joe, "so will I."

Now, more waiting. Sis was quiet and glum. Klayr looked tired but didn't complain. Joe was serious but not really despondent, and Gaje was actually enjoying himself. It pleased Murno to see how well the two boys got on together, and how they pitched in to help with everything.

Murno and the boys tied themselves to their places so they wouldn't fall. A new moon went down shortly after dark, leaving the brilliant stars and the Milky Way. Murno would rather have seen clouds.

He was awake for a while, but must have slept two or three hours before something woke him up. When he was fully awake he realized what it was. The air felt like rain. He got untied and shook the boys awake. "Gather the stuff."

Klayr and Sis woke up, and he told them, "We may be moving." They got everything packed and didn't have to wait long for the first drops. He got them down and started along the ravine.

Klayr hesitated at the creek until he said, "It's all right; we scouted

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it." He took them across and headed east, not bothering with the deerskins since geehawks wouldn't be out in the rain. They were leaving a visible track, even though the scent would be washed out, but that couldn't be helped. There ought to be enough animal tracks in the grass to make theirs unexceptional.

He wondered if large predators would be out in the rain. He thought not, unless they were hungry. Of course, the hungry ones were precisely what he had to fear. Still, at this season they should be well-fed.

They went steadily for two hours, then stopped when another line of trees loomed ahead. They rested and ate and listened. He decided to cross the creek, or whatever it was. They found it not much different from the first one, and went on. With the first light he found a large oak and got everyone installed. He might have gone farther, but the rain was slackening again.

Later in the morning, when the clouds were gone, he climbed as high as he could for a look around. The hills were out of sight. All he could see in any direction was flat land, except for a few low rises and ravines. The oaks were sparsely scattered here. Far to the east was another waterway.

He saw no geehawks and no grav cars. He was beginning to feel more confident. He was still too close to the bay for comfort, but so far the country was so unthreatening he saw no reason for not going on.

He spent the day napping and studying the land. There were rabbits in profusion, and ground birds twice the size of quail. Near the waterway to the east, a herd of cattle grazed. He'd never killed anything that size with arrows, but no doubt it could be done. For that matter, there ought to be calves. He felt of the Gaddyl weapon, a heavy bulk slung under his left arm. It would kill any game he might desire, at plenty of range; but he didn't think he dared use it. The Gaddyl might have some way of tracing it if it were fired.

For the time being he thought it would have to be mostly raw eggs. Salted, they seemed to agree with everyone. The raw fish had been uninspiring.

Once he saw a fox stalk and catch a young cottontail. Hawks, smaller than geehawks, kept the gophers and ground birds wary. He fixed in his mind the locations of several nests. As soon as it was dark, he thought, he'd gather eggs and start east again.

He carried out that plan, and a similar one the next night. There'd been no more rain, but breloons weren't likely to be spread out this far, unless he was unlucky enough to run into a sporting party. Even without rain, a scent-trail wouldn't last much over twenty-four hours here.

He couldn't get careless, of course, but he could stop pushing the family so hard.

V

He put that into practice sooner than he expected. The next night, when they'd travelled for

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only about three hours, he hesitated before a line of trees. Probing into them, he discovered a drop-off of a few feet; and beyond that clumps and thickets that reminded him of the bottomland along some parts of the sack toe river. It was too dark and tangled to be inviting. He decided to get up into a tree until morning.

During the rest of the night his ears were busy. There seemed to be a river about fifty yards away, with large fish in it that broke surface now and then. Nearer, there was a busy population of small animals. A great owl, silent and ghostly in the faint light, sailed past once, only a few feet from his eyes.

There were more disturbing sounds beyond the river; distant roars and screeches as if big animals fought. He decided they were only squabbling over a kill. There were howlers too; some of them coyotes and others possibly wild dogs. There were squalls and hubbubs he couldn't identify. The river seemed to be a boundary, since the meeker beings on this side paid no attention to the distant sounds.

In the morning Klayr, who had evidently heard things too, watched him so steadily that Murno finally said, "Well, what is it?"

"Do we have to go on?"

He'd been pondering that himself. He said, "I didn't like the sound of things over there. I think we'll stop for one day at least, and look around."

He waited a couple more hours before moving at all. The country had an unhunted feel about it. It was warmer here, too. He studied the bottomland below them. The clumps were mostly willow, saucy now in their catkins, competing for space on raised plots of ground with smaller bushes and grasses. In between, the ground was washed down to a thousand waterways and cross-channels. Mostly it was dry and sandy, but there were still pools and trickles left from the last flood. Driftwood was piled up against every prominence. There were a few bigger islands where trees grew; cherries with their pink and white blossoms and taller trees like the ones he'd been seeing along every creek, and a lot of kinds he didn't know. The birds were busy; and he saw one raccoon out for a late breakfast of frogs or mice. When the sun was well up, rabbits began invading the area.

It was the way the small things acted that decided him. "It looks good to me," he said. "Let's start looking. If we can find the right kind of a place we may stay for a while."

They climbed down and went toward the river. It was about as wide as he'd guessed. There were tule marshes noisy with waterfowl. Already families of ducklings paddled in solemn formations behind their mothers. In the mud were the tracks of the small animals he'd heard during the night: muskrats, coons, otters, skunks, foxes and bobcats.

He found a patch of trees that suited him, well-rooted but with limbs out over a marsh, and thickly

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leaved. He got the boys started cutting poles for a platform, then went out to gather eggs and look around a little more.

There were so many fat cottontails he couldn't resist bagging a couple. He needed practice anyway; he hadn't drawn a bow for over a week. Then, with fresh meat in his hands, he had to consider a fire. They couldn't go on eating raw stuff forever. There had to be a first fire, and it might as well be here.

He got a pouchful of eggs on the way back, and gathered some dry driftwood.

Klyr almost danced when he told her they could cook. He built the fire against the trunk of a tree where the smoke would have to rise through the foliage. There was very little of it, if he watched the wood he used. He found three rocks to confine it and turn in the heat, and by that time Klayr had the rabbits skinned and spitted. Roasting, they smelled almost too good to believe. The whole country had a good smell. There was a sagey smell about it that he associated more with autumn than this time of the year, but maybe that fit in with the heat of the sun and the heavy warmth of the air.

Before dark he let the fire die to glowing coals and piled the eggs among them, then covered it all over with dirt.

The platform was well enough along to be livable. As he stretched out that night he realized for the first time just how tired and lame he was. He felt guilty; the others must have suffered even more. But now he couldn't help considering how well off he really was . . . if he'd gotten clean away from the Gaddyl. They could eat like human beings, and sleep in comfort. They had clothes, deerskins for blankets or wraps, rope, knives and bows, a hatchet, plenty of salt and some ground red peppers.

He had to remind himself that that was a dangerous way to feel.

In the morning he took Gaje with him to scout up-river. After they'd gone a little way they found a place where the stream would be easy to swim, and risked crossing over to the other side. They climbed a tree at the far edge.

To the east was another waterway, much like this one so far as they could see. In between the land seemed to be subject to partial floods. There were rises where grass and a very few oaks grew, but most of it was more like the bottomland, with willow thickets and bare spots. It was higher than the bottomland, though, and pretty dry now.

A little way south a small ravine ran east from the river, pretty well grown with the short willows. Murno said, "Let's have a look up that."

There were pools of stagnant water in the ravine, swarming with pollywogs and some bigger black things that looked like lizards with vertically flat tails. This seemed to be a particular habitat of crows, which protested their passage with indignant caws. They flushed one coyote which eyed them curiously before slipping out of sight.

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They found one of the kills. It had been a fairly-grown colt, dragged here from somewhere south. A horde of vultures flapped and squawked around it. There were feline tracks, much bigger than cougars'. It was pretty plain that the lions, if that was what they were, laired in this wildly thicketed stretch between the rivers. Murno said, "Let's not prowl around here too much."

They crossed back and went up the west side of the river. There wasn't much change in the next few miles, but then they came to a fork. The farther branch seemed to loop out toward the east. On the chance that it was a split channel of the other waterway, Murno crossed over and climbed another tree to make sure. It was not; there was perhaps five miles between the two at the closest.

They crossed back to the gore between the two forks and began to explore it. Walnut and pear trees, cherries, locusts, many he didn't know, and the inevitable willows, choked it and promised edibles for the fall. It might even be a good place to set up residence. He thought another day they might explore up it to find out if it were really an island, or whether the river was actually two streams. There were swamps, too, with waterfowl. The whole place was raucous with birds.

Before they started back, Murno heard a grunt that brought him to a silent halt. He motioned to Gaje to follow, and moved carefully inland. Before he'd gone far he smelled pigs.

He stalked them and found eight or nine in a wallow at the edge of a thicket. There were no old boars to fear. He chose a young boar and put an arrow where he wanted it, and got in a second before the animal plunged out of sight. He didn't particularly enjoy hearing it squeal, but he and the family had to eat. He heard it die not far away. The rest of the pigs had vanished.

They butchered on the spot, so the other pigs would eat the entrails and destroy any sign. He let Gaje carry the two forelegs. He himself tied the hams together by the feet and hung them around his neck with the strips of loin.

Klayr looked positively greedy when she saw the meat. She said, "Oh! Ooh! Can I cook it today?"

"Part of it, at least," he said, "and maybe you can sear the rest so it'll keep better."

The boys ran to build up the fire.

It was shortly before sundown that Gaje, high in the platform tree, called down, "Pa."

Murno went up as fast as he could. He couldn't get as high as Gaje, but he got high enough to see the specks in the sky over the waterway to the east.

Numbing disappointment filled him. They were geehawks, no doubt of that, and from the way they flew they must be ranging ahead of a breloon search. Nearby trees prevented him from seeing the cars, which would be lower down.

He told himself he mustn't lose his nerve, and climbed down. "Get the fire out. I'm going across the river

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for a while." Klayr looked so upset at the idea that he added, "I've got to know what they're doing."

He trotted to the water and waded in. His mind didn't want to work very clearly. He found a tree on the other side that would give him a view.

He counted six grav cars. The search was moving slowly southward. Soon it was too far for him to see the hawks, but he could still see the cars. At sundown four of them landed, doubtless to pick up breloons, then all six flew away to the northwest, passing a little closer to Murno on the way. They were going home for the night, but there'd be a shift of hawks left out.

He climbed down and started back, a little calmer now. As he pictured the country, these streams all came from the south and joined the san wah keen somewhere north of here. He guessed he'd been wrong in thinking they wouldn't search the tributaries this far east; unless they had some particular reason for suspecting that particular one. What he had to assume was that they were searching them one by one. They hadn't been up this one yet, or he'd have seen breloon tracks. That might mean they'd started somewhere east and were working back this way. In which case, this stream was next.

If they started each search at the san wah keen, that meant he had until tomorrow afternoon to be out of here. If he left tonight and went carefully, the scent would be gone in time. But if they started nearer, they might be able to follow.

Even if all his guesswork were right, he had no really safe plan. The only thing he could think of was going across to the far stream, under the deerskins, and continuing on east. He'd have to start as soon as it was dark, and hope to evade the hawks and whatever predators were out. He wished he had some of the bearskin boots, which would confuse the breloons if they did happen to pick up his trail. He wondered if pigskin would do the same thing. But he hadn't enough of it, and there wasn't time to make boots.

But thinking about it gave him an idea.

VI

He told the boys, "Get the platform apart and hide the wood in the swamp where it won't float out into sight. Bury those ashes somewhere, and clean up everything."

While they were doing that he helped Klayr get things wrapped. Then he got them moving. The smell in the tree might linger for two or three days; he couldn't help that. He took them away from the river, out to where they could move fast. "Walk in the dry dirt," he said, "and don't brush against anything."

It was dark long before they reached the fork. He took them across to the gore, and had them stand in a marshy spot. He took one of the waterbags in to the hog wallow and scooped it full of the reeking mud, then tied it shut.

He led them across the east fork

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and onto the bank. "Smear this stuff thick all over your feet and legs," he said.

Sis said, "Ooh; ugh," but obeyed. When they were finished he squeezed out the bag over the place they'd been standing. They went out onto the land between the two streams, somewhere near the point where they approached closest. Murno could not go on all fours; he had to walk stooped over so Sis, who had no deerskin, could walk in front of him. His back felt as if he could never straighten up again. Still, he didn't dare do anything else; there wasn't enough cover to be safe from the hawks. They had to stop frequently.

It was at one of those stops that he realized something was stalking them.

All he heard, probably, were things too faint to register consciously; but they added up to the sure feeling. Thoroughly scared, he felt for his knife, then remembered the Gaddyl weapon he had been carrying.

The others knew something was wrong. He said, "Start on. I've got to find out what it is."

As they rounded a clump of brush he stopped and waited. He could hear the family going on. He waited for what seemed a very long time, trying not to breath audibly, until he was sure something must have passed him and was after the family. Then, to his left, he caught the vaguest movement. Without turning his head, he moved his eyes that way There was a dim outline, something bulky, half-hidden behind another bush twelve or fifteen feet away. He felt with his thumb to make sure the safety of the weapon was off.

Starlight flashed in two eyes as the thing turned its great head toward him, then it leaped. He flung up the weapon and fired. In the frozen instant before the flash blinded him, he could see that the beam took it high across the chest. He rolled frantically and it landed where he'd been.

It was thrashing and screaming in an awful choked-off way. He yelled, "Hide!" for the family's benefit, then scuttled toward another bush. He pressed himself into it, ignoring the twigs that gouged him.

The wings were there almost at once, though he could only see vague motion against the stars. The animal was still now except for a few jerky movements. The hawk swished over it in tight circles, uttering little cries.

But apparently their dim minds made nothing of the flash that had brought them here originally. They circled only for a minute, then left.

Murno lay limp and sweating until he felt able to move. Then he crawled on and found the family forty or fifty yards away.

Now the question was, did the Gaddyl have some way of recording the discharge this far away? He had to act as if they had. Neither could he assume they'd wait until morning to investigate. Even if they supposed it to be some hunting party out overnight, they'd come and make sure.

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It took them two hours more to reach the trees, drawing hawks twice but apparently passing inspection. Beyond the first line of trees, which was not as solid as it had looked, was a bottomland like the one they'd left. But when they reached the river itself, Murno stood staring for a minute. It was three times as wide as the one they'd left, and it had a real current. Then he understood. This was no tributary, but the san wah keen itself, turned south.

No wonder there'd been a search along it. It might be even that he'd been foolish to flush like a quail; they might not have bothered with the smaller stream. But it was too late to wonder now.

With luck, the breloons would follow his trail both ways, and turn up the pigs whose mud he'd borrowed. That would not puzzle the handlers very long, but the breloons would be confused. And the chase would start over, from where he was standing now.

He went downstream, investing half an hour in finding a swamp. That would pay off in splitting the search. From the swamp they waded into the river and fought across the current. It took them even farther downstream. But in the shallows on the other side, he made the hard decision to head south, upstream, again. That meant closer to the hawks, but it was the only right way. Downstream meant flat land and concentrated searches. Upstream meant mountains, sooner or later, and cover.

Without stepping out of the water, he led them up the shallows. Most of the way it was in the open or through tule swamps, so they had to bend forward under their deerskins, which slowed them down. He was full of the feeling that dawn must be near, though he knew he'd lost all track of the time. He expected this part of the river to be searched again, possibly even before daylight, and all he had to rely on was his and the family's endurance. He kept pushing them on, though he himself felt giddy with exhaustion and could hardly lift Sis when he had to carry her.

What he needed was a sidestream leading east. He would not accept the first one they passed, though the temptation was enormous, because that was too obvious. The second one was smaller; but by that time there was a faint glow in the east and he didn't dare stay on the river.

They went a little way up the stream, then he let them stand in the water for a few minutes of comparative rest. They leaned together so they wouldn't fall, and he had to slap them awake to go on. At least the willows gave them some cover here. He was in the lead, with Sis walking behind him and holding to his jacket and the others single file behind. He kept lifting one foot and putting it ahead of the other, by sheer concentration. He was half-asleep even as he walked, with two things only in his mind — a distress at the way he was punishing the family, and the sheer need to put distance behind him.

Finally, when the pace became

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so slow and the stops necessarily so frequent that it simply wasn't worth while to go on, he found a place where the willows grew thick and deep and helped the others crawl in among them. The bank was moist and cold, but it was ecstasy to lie down at all.

Before he let himself sleep he got Sis's moccasins off, wiped her feet as dry as he could, and wrapped the smallest skin around them. He made the others take care of their feet. The water hadn't been icy, but it was cold enough so he worried that it might have some permanent bad effect. His own feet had been numb for hours.

Sometime during the morning there were sounds from the direction of the river that woke him up. Breloons were tracking something, going upstream, and the handlers were angry with them and calling them back. Possibly his trick with the mud from the hog wallow had succeeded in confusing the beasts; or maybe it was some other animal they'd taken out after. Anyway, they didn't come far up this creek, if at all, and soon the search moved on south. If they did nose along here, they'd surely find the humans, but Murno was too tired to consider going on yet.

It would almost be welcome to be caught and have it over with. He looked at the others, sprawled in lax sleep, and pushed that idea from his mind.

Late in the day Sis woke up and was hungry, so he woke the others too, and they finished the last of the cooked pork and most of the eggs. He was still lugging the two hams, tied by the shanks and hung around his neck, and Joe had the strips of loin. He wasn't willing to jettison the meat yet. In another day or two he might be able to build another fire.

Now that his head was clear again, he pondered just why they hadn't been found yet. Possibly his simple tactic of seeming to go downstream had spread the search out enough so they hadn't gotten to this creek. He still had no other plan than to keep going east, tonight if nothing prevented it. He considered the situation. If they took to the stream again, all the breloons would turn up here would be the scent where they'd slept. That would persist for two or three days probably. The beasts had no way of indicating to the handlers just what a scent was, so if there were no visible signs left the handlers wouldn't know whether it was human or something else. It wasn't like setting them on a human scent and letting them follow it.

Everything depended on what kind of country lay ahead. He decided to get moving while it was still light, and try to find some place where he could see to the east.

That didn't work out at first. The creek wound through flat country, and he was afraid to leave it. There were no trees worth climbing. He kept on, as the night came.

A couple of hours later they reached hillier country and the creek was in a ravine with oak-covered slopes on both sides. Then it split, and he took the left-hand fork

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because that seemed to be the deeper canyon. The willows were gone now, replaced by other trees he didn't recognize in the dark, though the bark felt like cherry. The slopes blotted out the stars on either side. There seemed to be no more oaks. The silhouettes against the sky were of short bushes.

They finished off the eggs around midnight and rested briefly. The water was colder now, though there was less of it. They were groping their way over rocks and up rapids, and Murno wondered if they hadn't better leave the creek. When they reached an actual four- or five-foot waterfall, he made up his mind.

He led them up the northern slope, groping through the brush. In five minutes the slope leveled to a gentle eastward rise.

They seemed to be on a rather narrow rising ridge, and he could hear another stream in the canyon before them. He turned east, up the ridge. He could see the stars on all sides now, but there seemed to be higher land to the east.

It was quite dry here, and the brush had such a smell of its own that he didn't think they were leaving a scent that would last.

He kept on up the ridge, on the principle that as much altitude as possible was desirable, other things being equal. He concentrated more on going quietly and listening than on making speed. He didn't know what might be encountered here.

There were still no trees, but before dawn he picked out a large bush that grew in a crescent shape, and cleared spaces so they could get fairly well out of sight. It was cold, even though they were out of the wind, and they huddled together under what covers they had.

Hunger, the next immediate problem, could hardly be solved until he knew more of the nature of the country. He could not risk a fire here in the open, and pork mustn't be eaten until it was thoroughly cooked. He was beginning to wonder if he shouldn't have stayed with the canyon. He'd expected trees of some sort up here.

VII

In the morning the brush looked different. It was only two or three feet high, mostly in clumps not more than a yard across and scattered eight or ten feet apart. The clump he'd picked was one of the biggest. The trunks were gnarled and stunted-looking, and grew far enough apart so one could burrow through. The leaves, round and no bigger than his smallest fingernail, grew in thick mats.

The land fell sharply to the west. To the east the hills were pretty much the same as here, with a slight general rise, but in a few places he could see pine-covered mountains beyond. They looked to be a full day's hike away, at least. He could only see the two canyons, on either side of them. He could see where they joined, and the whole length of the creek they'd come up.

The san wah keen must have been a little farther away than it looked, for he could barely make out three or four grav cars over it,

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and he couldn't see the hawks at all. He could see beyond to the lesser river where they'd camped for one day and night. The distance between the two looked ludicrously short from here.

He began to hope that the Gaddyl still expected to find him somewhere along those two rivers. They must know by now that he had a family along; they could hardly have failed to read the tracks between the rivers. Maybe they just couldn't conceive that woman and children could have gotten this far. Putting himself in their place, he could see that there was a tremendous amount of country to cover, even having found the dead lion.

But not too tremendous, perhaps; and anyway his urging now was toward those pine-covered mountains he could glimpse. He could build a fire there; make a tree-dwelling, maybe, and learn the new ways.

He said, "I think we'd better start on. We'll go very slowly and keep what cover we can, and stay on the lookout for cars or hawks. If we spot any we'll have to get under these bushes fast."

He led off, feeling very much exposed and wondering if Gaddyl telescopes over the san wah keen might be searching these hills. He didn't want to spend another night in this kind of country. The Gaddyl had some kind of instrument that picked up body heat, and it worked much better in the cool of night. It didn't work at much distance, but if a car flew over a man hiding beneath scant brush like this, at night, it would spot him.

They took cover once when a car seemed to be coming in their direction, but it was only searching the creeks near the river, judging by its actions. Murno stared down the slope into the canyon near them. It was tempting to go back down to the cover along the stream, but he hated to sacrifice the time and the elevation. In the end they went crouched over until they had a hill between themselves and the grav car.

Now he coud see the solid pine forests ahead, and his eagerness made him push a little faster. They had only the one waterbag since he'd gotten rid of the mud-fouled one, and it wouldn't last long.

Relief came sooner than he expected. Shortly after noon he saw that the stream to their right was much nearer with the sharp rise of its canyon. There began to be pines along it. He couldn't see because of a turn, but it looked as if the pines might run up it clear to the forests. "Let's go down," he said, "we need water anyway."

He was so relieved at having cover again that he wondered why he'd been so stubborn. They drank and rested by the small brook. Its bed was too rocky, and the water too cold, to encourage wading. But at least, the rocks along its way wouldn't hold a track.

The only food he could think of here, except possibly for raw fish, was pine nuts. They spent an hour gathering fallen cones, getting the nuts out and cracking them. They took the edge off the hunger, but the work was slow. They moved on.

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The brook forked again, and again he took the branch that rose steepest. It was late in the day now, and he had to find a place to stop.

He picked a place where some big boulders offered fair protection and pines grew partially overhead. He had to get a fire going, both to cook and to keep animals away during the night, and he needed it soon so he could use it to dry out more wood while it was still daylight. After dark it need only be a sheltered glow.

Dry wood wasn't easy to find, and he worried about the smoke the fire made. He had it in a good place, under the bulge of one rock and hidden in all directions except straight up, and placed so they could all sleep fairly near it. He sent Gaje up a pine to keep a lookout, and had Joe fill the waterbag so they could douse the fire fast if necessary.

The fire continued to smoke, and he had to ignore the risk and let Klayr cook. He scouted around, keeping an eye out for danger signs and gathering wood and pine cones. The cones didn't smoke any worse than the wood, and they were easy to get, and besides they provided rich, if meager, food.

Sundown passed, and he worried less about the smoke. He called Gaje down and they had a last look around. They were at the edge of the level bed of the canyon, fifteen yards or so from the creek, which flowed fairly level here so it didn't make much noise. He rigged one of the skins to mask the fire from above as much as possible. Now again he had to consign himself to luck and whatever gods watched over humans.

The night closed in, crisp and black. He let the fire diminish and moved smaller rocks around it so its light wouldn't keep their eyes too unadjusted to the dark. It was not going to be a warm night; the rocks were cold and seemed to soak up all the fire's little warmth; and the pine boughs he'd cut for bedding didn't add much.

He let the two boys take the first watch because he thought he'd be more reliable after midnight, and told them to wake him then. Klayr and Sis were already dozing. He squirmed himself into as comfortable a position as he could discover, and realized again how tired and lame he was.

Sometime later he woke suddenly and found Gaje standing over him. "Pa," the boy said, very quietly. "There's something out there."

Murno rolled to his feet and glanced quickly around to see if the women were all right. They were still asleep.

He slid along the rock behind Gaje, trying not to let any light from the fire strike his face. Even so, he could see nothing in the darkness. He felt for his knife, then for the Gaddyl weapon, though he was not anxious to use that again.

Joe was crouched between the two rocks that formed the creekward part of their shelter. Murno eased himself down behind him. There was the small voice of the stream, nothing more. But then a pair of

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eyes glowed for an instant beyond the stream. His own eyes were beginning to adjust now, and he sensed vague motion in the starlight. Then another pair of eyes flashed. He thought they might be cougars; the eyes were about the right height above ground and cougars' eyes reflected starlight in that way. But then he realized they were too far apart for cougars' eyes.

He wondered if lions would come this far up, and reached for the weapon.

The whole place seemed to erupt.

The first thing he heard was a splash of water. The fire went out. At the same instant, nearly, something landed on top of him. He twisted, trying to break free, and landed hard on a rock. He fought desperately, but at least two pairs of arms, strong and quick arms, pinned him down. The rocks dug into his back.

He heard the women scream, and Gaje shouted something. Then everything else was drowned out as male voices, a dozen or so, began to shout in a staccato cadence. His head spun so violently he thought he'd been clubbed. But the jar was inside his skull, not on it. He tried to shut his mind against the shouting, but three or four heads were bent close to his ears. His brain seemed to turn over, and he lost consciousness.

VIII

When he came to he was trussed so he couldn't move a limb, and was being carried over someone's shoulder like a limp bag of something. It was daylight. His upper body was hanging down behind his bearer, so that his nose bumped against the flexing back. He gasped at the skin he saw. It was smooth, like a woman's but not delicate, and light blue.

He heard Gaje say, "Pa!" and twisted his head. His son was being carried in the same manner behind him. He stared at the blue man who was toting Gaje.

Gaje said, "Pa! Was that you?"

Murno realized the boy must have heard him gasp, or maybe he'd been groaning as he came to. "I'm here," he said.

A rather high, pleasant male voice from somewhere up front sang a single musical note. Other voices took it up, including the one that belonged to his own bearer. He could feel the man's — or creature's — diaphragm flex as he sang. It was a simple chant, quiet and harmonious, but with queer shifts of key that confused Murno.

He began to feel drowsy. Suddenly he realized what was happening, and shouted hoarsely. He began to writhe in his bonds.

Their captors sang louder, and stepped up the tempo a little. His head whirled again. He fought to stay conscious but he was slipping down, down into some black hole, with every note that he heard whirling him, battering at his hands so he couldn't grab on to anything.

He went limp and fell endlessly into the hole . . .

When he awoke again it was morning, and he got the impression

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it was a different day. He was lying in a shallow cave, with his head turned toward the opening. Klayr lay in front of him. He stared at her back and saw that she was breathing easily.

He realized he was untied, and sat up gingerly. His left side was very sore from falling on the rock. He stopped moving and stared.

Outside the mouth of the cave sat five of the blue men, cross-legged, nude except for moccasins and G-strings, and belts from which some unfamiliar objects hung. They might have been asleep sitting there, except that their eyes were staring straight into his own. Their faces were expressionless.

They were young faces, barely mature, and very handsome. He could see slight differences between them. Their scalps were naked, shiny blue, except for a small patch of short hair over the forehead. Their ears grew pointed, like a dog's, and were hairy, with inch-long tufts sticking straight up from the tops. All the hair was dark blue. Their eyes had no irises except a very pale ring of blue, which made the pupils all the more staring. They had long eyelashes like a girl's. The features, and their whole bodies, were finely formed, almost effeminate but lithe and strong-looking.

One of them, the one in the middle, suddenly opened his mouth and sang one high note. Then they sat there.

In two or three minutes another figure came into view and stopped beside the sitting ones. This one was obviously older, broader with muscle, and his skin looked more like a man's though it was still very smooth, unblemished and all the same shade of blue. He had a full head of blue hair, cropped short, a small mustache and a patch of beard. cut to one inch, on the point of his chin. He ears were longer, and the tufts of hair on them much longer. He looked at Murno for a few moments, then spoke, in queer English, pronounced strangely and inflected in the wrong places:

"Your family will not be harmed, if you do not fight us. Will you come out in the sun and talk?"

There was a gentleness — a courtesy, or at least an absence of rudeness — that soothed Murno's feelings a little. He looked around him. The others were all there, asleep.

The blue man said, "They are all right and will be awake later. I wanted to talk to you first."

Murno got up and went out into the sunlight, grimacing at various aches. When he stopped a few feet from the speaker, the man sat down like the other five. Murno followed suit. He felt giddy. Part of it was hunger. He felt as if he hadn't eaten for three or four days.

The spokesman sang out something, five or six notes, then said, "Food will come. Who are you and what are you doing in our hills?"

"I . . ." Murno's throat was stiff; he started over again. "We are running from the Gaddyl. My name is Murno and I am a freed man. From the bay."

"What bay?"

"The one with the mouth called

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golden gate. Are there others? A slave escaped, and I . . ." Murno realized he no longer had the weapon. He hesitated. There didn't seem to be much use in lying about the weapon, since he already had been relieved of it. "It was no longer safe where I lived. I had a stolen weapon. We have been running for —" He did not know the number of days.

"You planned very well, except for the affair with the lion."

Murno must have gaped. "You know of that?"

"We discovered you when you killed the pig. We thought then that you knew you must not use the weapon."

The talk was a little over Murno's head. "I had no choice with the lion," he said.

"With three knives and a hatchet? But of course, it is different with you."

Murno felt a little miffed. "Where is the weapon?" he asked, "And what are you going to do with us?"

"We have the weapon, and The Old One will decide about you. It may make you more comfortable to know that he has directed you are not to be hurt. It was he who decided we were to help you escape."

Murno looked at him. "I don't understand."

"You would not have gotten one day this side of the big river if we had not played some little tricks on the Gaddyl."

Murno thought it over. "Oh." Then he said, "Well, can I see this Old One now?"

"He will not be able to get here for a few days. I am to take you to a place to wait, but it is a long trip and you must rest and eat for one day at least. Will you promise not to try to escape?"

"Yes," said Murno, "I don't see what else I can do."

Murno could not wake up any of the others for three or four hours, then they began to stir spontaneously. By that time he had been given back his pork and some ears of corn and permitted to build a fire in the cave. By the time the others were awake he had food ready for them.

Klayr was the most shaken of them all by their experiences and shrank from the five guards, who had a cave of their own not far away. The boys and Sis were fascinated by the blue men, but didn't approach them too closely and didn't get any encouragement from the Mutants. The five Mutants were neither hostile nor friendly, but impassively aloof. They did not speak even among themselves. The only weapons they had were some darts, a foot long and less than an inch thick, with a pointed enlargement for a head and a taper to the other end, which was feathered. Murno figured out that they were meant to be thrown with the aid of a stick, eighteen inches long and fairly sturdy, with a fork at one end that might fit behind the heads of the darts. Darts and throwers seemed to be made of a dark hard wood. He spoke to the blue men once, trying to get them to show him how the

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darts were thrown, but they didn't answer.

One of the blue men had taken Murno on a short tour of the cliff, which had several shallow caves, of the creek near it, and of a small patch of trees around it. He did not speak but there was no misunderstanding that he was laying out the boundaries.

On the second morning the spokesman came again, talked a little to Klayr to try to reassure her, and left two plump turkeys and some more corn. He said he thought another day of rest was in order, and that they would be traveling the next morning.

Murno had not seen a turkey since his freeing, and the others had never seen one. He knew they flocked wild somewhere in Kalf, but not where. The birds were delicious. He felt a little sorry for the five guards, who had only some corn and some crumbly-looking stuff that came out of small leather bags and that might be some sort of dried meat. They did not act sorry for themselves, and ignored the smell of the roasting the turkey.

The next morning they ate early and packed to be ready. When the spokesman appeared he had with him four younger men, much like the five guards except that each of them had two patches of hair instead of one. He also brought back Murno's and Gaje's bows, all the arrows and the hatchet. By now Murno had decided it would be foolish to try to fight his captors, and the weapons did nothing to change his mind.

He got an unpleasant surprise. When they were ready to leave, the spokesman and the four new guards lined up before him and the family, eyeing them silently. Then the spokesman made an odd little gesture with his hands. One of the four made a similar gesture, then another stretched out his arm and made a different one.

All ten hands were moving now, first one, then another, so that Murno's eyes shot back and forth trying to see them all. He noticed that the five original guards had crowded close, their faces showing an expression for the first time. The expression was intense interest.

His brain began to spin, and he realized suddenly that this was precisely the way the chanting had made him feel. He darted a look at the family. They were all staring at the hands. "Shut your eyes!" he shouted, squeezing his own shut. He barely had will power enough to do it.

But shutting his eyes made no difference at all. The waves of darkness still battered at his mind. Actually, it was as if he could still see the weird pattern the hands were weaving.

Then he was unconscious again but this time not entirely so. A dull part of his mind was aware of his legs marching, aches in his muscles and the regular drawing of his breath. He knew they stopped and he sat, and ate. He was dimly aware that the family was with him. He knew that night came and he slept, then plodded on through another day.

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Then it was morning, and he sat up on a gentle slope among pine trees.

Gaje was just waking up, and the others were stirring. A little pile of things lay beside him: the rest of the pork, as he had wrapped it; the deerskins; some other bundles that looked like corn wrapped in leather. And his own waterbag, along with a new one.

The ground dropped off sharply a few yards away. He got up, impelled by some vague memory or urge, and stepped to the drop-off. The pines marched down a steep slope. Out across the valley he could see another one, higher if anything than their own position. From the bottom of the canyon came the sound of a stream.

These were different pines than he was used to, with trunks that forked instead of rising straight among small branches. There were madronas too, and a completely new set of smaller growths. An unfamiliar bird was yammering somewhere. A squirrel perched on a limb not far away, watching him with beady intentness.

Now things came back to him that he must have heard in his walking sleep. This was a valley where they were to stay. They might go as far up it as they could in two days, but it would not be any better than here. They must not climb out of it nor go below the gorge that he could just hear in the distance. There was game and no danger so long as he stayed put, and kept out of sight. He must be careful about his fires because Gaddyl cars sometimes flew over and would investigate smoke.

He said, "We may as well go down and find a place to camp."

IX

The lower part of the canyon was a gentle curve, strewn with rocks and grassy where the trees did not grow. There was a thick growth of gooseberries at one place, and some onions in another. There was corn, but it was uncultivated and poor. This looked like a place someone had farmed once, but not recently. There was no sign of a dwelling.

Despite the promise that there was no danger here, he was reluctant to camp on the ground. He decided to build a tree platform on the other slope, where the morning sun would strike first.

He gave that project to the boys again, and told them to help Klayr build the kind of a fireplace she wanted. He set off upstream to see what was there.

He found plenty of deer signs, and some cougar tracks. He liked having cougars around; they never bothered people and were even almost friendly, in a cautious curious way; and where cougars were, dog packs weren't. There were bears here too, which had to be treated with a little more care. There were some other tracks similar to deer but not the same. They weren't sheep's tracks, but the spoor was similar.

Later in the day he caught sight of the animals that had left them,

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on a rocky ledge far up the canyon. They were something like sheep but bigger and less blocky, with horns that curved back hugely from the tops of their heads, and straight fur that hung down like a skirt. They were pure white. When he saw them they had his scent, and were leaping up fantastic rock slopes to higher country.

He contented himself with shooting two squirrels, as much for the bow practice as for the meat, and studying the strange birds. They were colorful and had strange songs, but were not otherwise spectacular..

He spent the next day resting and working on the platform. The following day, because the supply of food could stand bolstering, he started off up-canyon early, thinking he might get something beside squirrels.

The white animals he'd seen weren't around, and the deer were all up on the ridges, where he wasn't supposed to go.

It wasn't a question of starvation. The squirrels were all right, and the boys could catch brook trout whenever they wanted to; so he didn't press his search as far as he might have. In the early afternoon he started back, exploring as he came.

A mile or so from the camp he decided he'd better get two or three squirrels. He had an aim on one when it suddenly darted behind the tree-trunk, as if it had seen something. He whirled and saw four young Blue Mutants watching him motionlessly.

He looked at them for a while, then said, "Well?"

They didn't answer. He decided if they wanted to stand and stare at him, he shouldn't favor them with any attention. He turned and began to work around the tree for another chance at the squirrel.

It had gone higher, and he had to wait for it to turn its back, but finally he got the chance and put an arrow into the back of its head. It kicked a few times and fell to the ground.

He heard a grunt behind him, and turned to find that the blue men had gotten behind him again.

It disturbed him; for a second he wondered if his ears were going bad. But he could hear the faint forest sounds as well as ever. It was just as bad to think that the blue men were better woodsmen than he.

They watched intently as he recovered his arrow and slung the squirrel at his belt. At least, he thought, he could give them an exhibition with the bow. He'd never met anyone he couldn't outshoot. He went hunting for another squirrel. He found one before long, but before he drew the bow he looked behind him.

They were there, all right, and he was just in time to see one of them use his own weapons. He used the stick to fling the dart, as Murno had guessed; not overhand but with a quick, almost casual, flip of forearm and wrist, held near the waist. The dart went incredibly fast.

But it missed the squirrel by two inches, and the other three mutants

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laughed. The shooter looked downcast and walked off to find his dart. Murno couldn't help grinning. It had been a hard shot, though. He hadn't been at all sure he was going to get the squirrel himself.

He needed at least one more, and he thought he'd give them something to stare at. He went hunting for the right circumstance. It took him a while to find it, but finally he did. A jay and a squirrel were on the same limb, scolding at each other. He had a shot from far enough to the rear so he didn't think the squirrel would see the arrow in time.

This was a real exhibition shot. Not that he couldn't put an arrow into an apple nine times out of ten at that distance — in a game — but this was different. He had to plan on a certain amount of foliage in the way, and arch the arrow just right; and ordinarily a squirrel would hear the shaft and make some movement. He was counting on the squirrel's absorption and the jay's noise.

He found his pulse was quicker than it should be, and had to resist turning his head to see if the blue men were there. He worried briefly that he was out of practice; he'd done so little shooting since the trouble had come up. But when he set his arm against the pull, reflexes took over. This was not a full-force shot, but a light one, arched over a pine limb so that it was actually descending by the time it got to the squirrel.

He hadn't aimed for the head; that was too much vanity. He'd aimed for the middle of the body, and hit it. The squirrel's head was already turning, but too late. The shaft knocked it off the limb, and it was dead by the time it hit ground.

He could not resist turning them, and he must have looked very smug at the wide eyes of the four mutants. He said nothing, but turned again and went after his squirrel. By the time he got it he felt a little foolish. He'd put an arrow where it shouldn't be, for the sake of the meat, just to show off.

He got his third squirrel very ordinarily and started toward camp, wondering if the mutants were going to follow. After three or four hundred yards he got a shock. They stepped into sight ahead of him.

It was his turn to look dismayed, and theirs to grin. They'd gotten around him, moving at least three times as fast as he did, without a whisper of sound and without disturbing the forest.

More upset than he cared to show, he passed them very close and marched on.

When he got near the camp he noticed it was very quiet and that there was some smoke from the fire. He broke into a run.

The family were sprawled on the ground, motionless. He ran and bent over Klayr He was almost dizzy with relief when he saw that she was breathing. So were the others. He shook Klayr, and shook her again. She moved in her sleep but would not wake up. Her face was peaceful.

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He stood up, trembling with anger now. There was no doubt the blue men had put them to sleep; some time ago, by the looks of things. He walked over and kicked the biggest stick out of the fire so it wouldn't smoke so much, then stood, furious but not knowing what to do.

He decided the first thing was to get them up on the platform where they'd be safer. That occupied the next half-hour, by the time he'd filled the waterbags and left them on the platform, along with food. He realized he was acting as if he were going somewhere.

He was hardly finished when prompting came. From down the valley came a clear high call, "Murno!"

He glanced at the fire to make sure it was all right, then headed off at a trot. It only took five minutes to get to where he thought the call had been. He stopped to listen. He didn't know what he intended to do; surely he couldn't fight all four of them at once, but murder was in his heart.

Things were too quiet. An odd feeling of danger filled him. He didn't know how to explain it, but suddenly he was racing for a tree.

He dragged himself up just as a blur of color shot from one side.

He escaped greedy claws by inches. He went higher. The feline made another start, and got ten feet up the trunk before giving up. It sat on its haunches and stared up at him with the innocent face of a cat toying with a mouse, or about to eat it.

A second one padded into sight and sat down a few yards away.

Murno had seen a life-size painting of a tiger, in the Gaddyl city. These were a little smaller, and bunchier, and had only a few stripes on their ribs and dabs of dark color elsewhere. Otherwise they were tawny like a cougar. They were definately heavier than cougars. He thought they might be some hybrid or mutation the Gaddyl had made at some time. If so, the breeders had not been stingy with teeth or claws.

He was wondering whether his arrows would be good enough, and planning where to place them, when the four blue men walked up.

From the casual way the two cats glanced at the mutants, he knew they were looking at their masters, or at least friends. He remembered the eyes in the darkness, just before the mutants had captured him. He said, "You'd better get your cats away from here if you don't want them full of arrows."

As usual the blue men didn't answer or change expression, but one of them — Murno thought the one who'd missed the squirrel — suddenly had a dart in the notch of his thrower. He held the dart in his left hand, the thrower in his right, easily, at his waist. Murno knew how fast he could flick it.

The blue man transferred dart and thrower to one hand for a second, patted the top of his head, then moved his hand up about six inches. Then he transferred the thrower again. The dart came at Murno so fast he didn't have time

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to duck. It hit the limb six inches above his head, and stuck there. He looked up at it. It was hardwood, all right. Hard enough to penetrate the pine . . . or his skull. He began to tremble a little with anger again. He wondered whether to try to draw his bow, or reach for his knife. He thought of the family, and held still for the time being.

Now the blue man tapped himself between the eyes. Murno got the idea. This time he anticipated the lightning flick of the thrower, and let his body drop until his legs were bent double.

The dart zipped where his face had been, and flew on into the forest. One of the two cats cocked his head after it, then looked back at Murno.

The blue man reached for another dart, and now Murno got the idea. They were driving him down closer to the cats. He remembered the spokesman's promise that he would be safe in this valley. He thought again of the family, and pictured them waking up and waiting, not knowing he wasn't coming back. Sick despair grew in his middle.

At least he was not going to die without a fight. This time, when the dart came, he flung himself around the treetrunk instead of dropping. The trunk and his own body hid his hand reaching for the knife. When the dart was past, he swung back to a comfortable balance, holding to the trunk with his left arm. His right was already behind him, ready to throw.

The blue men leaped for cover. The one who had been tossing darts at him was the last to move. Murno had planned to put the knife in his middle, or try to, but something in the blue face — not dismay, exactly, but a hurt look — made him hesitate. It flashed through his mind that, after all, they hadn't actually hurt him yet. He didn't have much time to decide; the mutant was already turning.

Now it seemed that Murno had all the time in the world. Once the mutant was moving, dashing for a treetrunk, it was possible to judge his speed and the knife's, and give a proper lead. Murno threw so that the edge of the blade would meet the side of the buttock.

His spin was a little off, and the angle not quite perfect, so the point dug in a little deeper than he intended. Still, he was satisfied enough to grin. The blue man would be sitting on the other side for a while. It gave him particular satisfaction to hear the little surprised cry the man gave: "Huy!"

Then the other three exploded with laughter. They whooped and danced, plain targets if he wanted them. He found that he didn't. He was still shaky, but his mouth insisted on turning up at the corners and he kept thinking, I'm one up on them. It's better than if I'd killed him.

Even the wounded man was laughing now, not quite so heartily as the others, but without rancor. He grinned at Murno and bobbed his head as if acknowledging he was bested.

Then the laughter ended, abrupt-

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ly. The four stood in a row eyeing him with no expressions except a trace of mischief. Then one of them tossed Murno's knife up to him.

They began to wave their hands.

Now Murno was frightened again. He knew what the strange gestures could do. He squeezed his eyes shut, slapped his free hand over them. It didn't help. His mind kneaded. He opened his eyes, shouted at the blue men, who continued their gestures calmly.

He went limp. He could feel himself sliding down, down; strengthless hands trying desperately to clutch at something. He felt himself strike the ground, was aware of the two cats coming down on him, felt the first digging of the claws. He twisted helplessly. His own screams were terrible in his ears. Something tore at his throat . . .

Then he was clinging to the tree, with a death-grip, shaking and sweating. The two cats sat on the ground, staring up at him with intent curiosity. Unbelievingly, he put a hand to his throat. He was all right.

The four blue men still stood in a line, their hands at their sides now. Red with humiliation, he glared back at them.

The one he'd scratched, still wiping at a drip of blood, said, "We will play no more jokes now. Your family will be awake." He sounded quite matter-of-fact.

"So you can talk," Murno said, almost ready to reach for his bow and take on the four of them.

They did not answer, but instead began to sing softly, their eyes on the cats. The beasts' ears went back, then twitched; both of the heads shook, as a cat will shake its head when something is in its ear. Then they got up and walked toward the blue men. They both lay down and squirmed onto their backs, purring, legs in the air. Two of the blue men bent over to scratch their bellies. Murno decided he'd take the blue man's word, and climbed down. They watched him go without either hostility or friendliness. The cats only glanced at him.

The family was awake, and worried. He did not tell them his whole experience, only that he'd met some blue men with two large felines and that everyone ought to be very watchful. He went to bed early, and slept all night.

X

They had the valley to themselves, so far as he could tell, for the next several days. Once when he was near the gorge that was the lower limit set for him, just after dark, he heard roars beyond the gorge which he thought might be the felines. He was not especially worried. He thought the blue men would keep their word.

One day he went far enough up the valley to find the white animals, shot one, and discovered with some disappointment that the meat tasted like mutton. Still it was not too distasteful to eat, especially now that they had onions to cook with it.

Then one morning he awoke to

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find six blue men sitting cross-legged a few yards away from the platform. He sat up, his first instinct to reach for his bow. Then he saw that one of them was the spokesman he'd met before.

The spokesman stood up and came closer. "Good morning, Murno. I am sorry some of my young men played rough jokes on you. They have been disciplined."

Murno did not know what to say. The family was awake now, and of course they didn't know about the experience. He said, "There was no harm." He was sure the four who'd done it were among the six here now; he was especially sure about the one he'd nicked, whose wooden expression yielded to a brief, faint smile as Murno met his eyes.

"The Old One will be here tomorrow," the spokesman said.

"Oh," said Murno, nodding.

The spokesman said, "We want a good feast for him; something better than venison, so we are sending out hunting parties. These five are one party. I must go to meet the old one, but these young men have taken a liking to you and they want you to hunt with them."

Murno hesitated, with mixed feelings. He did not absolutely trust the apparently immature blue ones and he wasn't keen about leaving his family. Seeing him hesitate, the one he'd scratched came to his feet in a single quick motion, face hardening. "It is a great compliment we pay you, pale one," he said.

The spokesman whirled toward the other. "Silence!"

Murno knew he must speak. "I do not fail to see the compliment," he said, "it is only . . ." He waved a hand toward his family.

The spokesman said, "They can go with me to the Old One, and you can join us there."

Murno did not dare hesitate longer. "In that case, I will be honored to hunt with my friends."

He went down the valley with the five, who did indeed have a tendency to clown and caper like adolescents, but who showed respect enough for Murno. He noticed now that the four who'd bedeviled him were missing the patches of hair over their foreheads. Maybe that was part of their punishment. They did not speak a word, except that the one who still limped slightly from the knife slash talked to Murno when it was absolutely necessary — perhaps as part of his punishment.

They went through the gorge, wading the creek at times and at others having to climb down small cliffs. When they were past it, into a wider valley, one of them called out in a high single note. A minute later there was a rushing in the trees, and the two felines loped into sight. They gamboled around the blue men as affectionately as any house cat in its friendliest mood. They even sniffed at Murno and let him scratch under their chins. They did not look vicious now.

The valley joined another, with a wider stream, and they went on down. Other canyons added themselves until the party emerged into lower, rolling country and followed what had become a fair-sized river.

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Murno did not know what they might be hunting, but the five blue men all carried spears as well as their darts, and the limping one — who seemed slightly older than the others — had a bow; the first Murno had seen among the mutants. It did not look inferior to his own.

They were a hundred yards from the river, walking boldly through the grass, when Murno saw gee-hawks, ahead and high. He halted.

The mutant with the bow said, "The birds ignore us. We are not at war with the Gaddyl."

"They may behave differently with me along."

The mutant looked thoughtful, nodded and turned toward the river. As usual, the others seemed to divine his decision instantly, and turned with him.

By the time they reached the thickets, the hawks were swooping over them. The mutants' faces hardened with anger, but they took cover and presently the hawks had lost them.

The sullen looks stayed on the young faces; Murno guessed because they had to accept the humiliation of being hunted.

In half an hour Murno heard breloons on their trail. They all stopped to listen, the blue faces fairly furious now. "They dare?" the limping one said.

"They are no doubt after me," Murno said. "They are nothing to game with. We'd better take to the water." He found he was shaking a little.

The mutant's face changed. "Game with?" he said. He looked intent, almost smiling. After a few moments he said, "We will find out. When we leave the water I will carry you so you do not leave a trail. We will see if they track the rest of us."

They went into the river, at an angle so it would look as if they continued downstream, then turned back up. When the breloons were near they crouched beneath some willows and let the beasts go by. Murno feared the breloons would see or smell them, but the blue men had chosen well; the cover was adequate and the slight but crisp north wind was in their favor.

When breloons and hawks had passed, they scanned the sky carefully, then took to the bank. They were following the breloons now, retracing their own steps. The five had completely lost their sullen mood, and were playful, though not reckless. The two cats had to be restrained. They seemed to hate the scent and sound of the breloons.

About halfway to where they'd entered the water before, they looped out away from the river to the edge of the grass. "Go a little farther alone," the one said to Murno.

Murno did not like this toying with disaster, but he did not think he could persuade them to stop. He went out onto the grass, being careful there were no hawks in sight, then came back. They went to the river again and waded in, and across to the other side. "Now," said the blue man, "I will carry you."

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Murno disliked that intensely, but he didn't argue. The mutant carried him with embarrassing ease, as he would have carried Gaje. They went upstream a little way to a heavy growth of trees. The mutant held Murno up so he could reach a limb, and said, "We will leave you here with the cats. We want to learn a few things." He had an almost mischievous look.

They went back downstream a little way, then circled out several times and came back. Murno knew they were leaving an obvious set of tracks.

Now they began to sing lightly to the cats, and it was as if they spoke an actual language. The cats padded toward some thick underbrush and slipped out of sight. The mutant said to Murno, "Hide well, where you can see the open. We will lead them there."

That made no sense to Murno, but it explained why they'd chosen a tree away from the river, at the very edge of the grove. He would have picked one better concealed.

Nevertheless, he did as he was told. He climbed to a comfortable fork where he was thinly screened from the open land to the south of the river, and could see out.

The blue men made a few more circles, then ran off upstream. The one who had a limp walking ran without it, as easily as the others. It was a pace Murno could not have begun to hold.

The breloons were on the north bank of the river now, milling around the trail puzzle. Then Murno heard Gaddyl voices.

It did not take the handlers long to decide that the quarry had crossed the river. Murno heard the breloons being loaded, and a few minutes later he heard them unloaded on this side of the river, a little downstream. The cars were out of sight, but he thought there were two of them. The hawks were evidently being left high up to scan.

The breloons came by almost under Murno's tree, once they'd puzzled out the circling trails. They passed not more than twenty yards from the thicket where the cats were hidden. A few of them obviously caught the scent, for they skewed aside warily, with nervous snarls. But it was part of the mixed scent they'd been put to trailing, and they did the most reasonable thing, for them: they stuck to the major trail.

Evidently the blue men had gone to the water again, for the breloons pulled up not far away. The Gaddyl seemed to be following overhead, for the handlers were quickly there. It sounded as if the cars landed on the river itself.

Then there was silence for quite a while. Finally he heard the breloons again, much farther upstream this time.

It came to his mind that the blue men might simply abandon him and run for home. But there were the cats, and he didn't think the mutants would leave them. Nor did he think they had anything in mind so prosaic as flight. They were playing another of their games.

Before long he knew the breloons were coming back down this way. It must be clear to the handlers

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now that they were being toyed with. He wondered if they knew they were trailing blue men. It was possible the breloons had started with Murno's scent, among the others, but switched to the other smell via the association. For all he knew, the blue men might even smell the same as non-mutants.

He did not think the Gaddyl would be pleased in any case.

It sounded as if the mutants had gone upriver, then turned and come straight this way, fast. He changed his position a little, and broke off a few branches that would improve his view without seriously exposing him. If the chase went by in the open, as the mutants had promised, he wanted to see.

He thought the young men were being very foolhardy, and wondered what the older spokesman would think. It occurred to him that he'd only seen the one mature mutant, and he wondered if there were more, beside the Old One himself. Sending out several hunting parties implied a feast for quite a few stomachs.

The chase was coming fast now, and he could tell that the breloons had the blue men in sight. They were in the open, then. He squirmed, uncomfortable with anxiety.

The mutants loped into sight, still running so easily it was obvious breloons alone would never catch them.

Then a grav car came into sight, and another. They were both big ones for carrying breloons.

Directly opposite Murno's tree — hardly more than thirty yards from him — the mutants suddenly stopped. They made a show now of being winded, though Murno was sure they were not. They formed a circle, knives out, their faces serious as if they were making a last stand.

The breloons surrounded them. Murno counted nineteen.

Now the cars came down, and Murno could see that each carried, beside the mutant slave who drove, one Gaddyl. He did not know them. They were grinning. They did not man the death-beam weapons of the two cars, but each had one of the rifles that shot metal bullets. This was a sporting party, then . . . though it might be aiding the search for the runaways as a side objective.

The older mutant, still working his lungs as if he were exhausted, glared at the aliens. "Call off your vermin! Can you not see we are blue?"

One of the Gaddyl grinned harder, and said, "Things have changed, savage. You are fair prey now."

The mutant's rage surely looked genuine, if it weren't. Murno thought he must realize now he'd been a fool. The blue man said, "You dare speak thus to a blue man? Call off these stinking beasts, before you lose some of them!"

Murno was so full of excitement and concern now that he felt he had to have some physical action, else he'd burst. He had to remind himself that only a thin cover of foliage hid him, and that the Gaddyl could see him if they happened to look straight toward him. He found his hand on his knife.

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Then he remembered the two felines, hidden below him. Like a sudden burst of light, he knew that the blue men were really playing a game. They did seem to be waiting for something.

Then he knew why they'd arranged things this way. They had given him a part in the drama.

The Gaddyl were relaxed, savoring the moment. The rifles were held so they could be brought to bear on the blue men quickly. Murno knew the pattern. If a mutant tried to use his knife on the breloons, he'd be shot in the shoulder, just to disable one arm. The Gaddyl enjoyed their hunting, and did not like to make the final kills too abrupt.

Slowly, unwillingly, Murno unslung his bow and tested the string. He got out two arrows, held one in his left hand with the bow and nocked the other. He sat motionless, but churning inside. Could he aim an arrow at a Gaddyl? A lifetime of conditioning said no; and the conditioning of his fathers before him.

Still, he was normal, and there'd been a time when normals fought the aliens. And the Gaddyl were surely his enemies now; deadly ones. And were not the blue men his friends?

He drew the bow reluctantly, and along with it a deep breath. He still did not know if he could release the arrow, or if he could trust his nerves even for an easy shot like this.

Suddenly the oldest mutant opened his mouth and sang one of the clear notes.

Murno heard the eruption in in the thicket, was aware of the two cats bursting into the open. As it often did for him in moments of crisis, time seemed to slow to a crawl. He could see the cats' leg muscles bunch, see their spines surge in the beautiful, unequaled feline stride. They seemed almost to float toward the breloons. The breloons were moving too, surprised but not panicked, leaping from the path of the charge and setting themselves in two groups, ready for the lightning clash. He saw the two Gaddyl's heads raise, watched their eyes swing toward the cats and the rifles begin to lift.

His own muscles moved as surely as always. The first arrow passed three inches above the rail of one of the cars and impaled that Gaddyl in the right of the chest. Before he let the second one go, he had time to remember that the Gaddyl heart was in the middle, and a little less protected by ribs than a man's. His second arrow killed the second alien a little faster. The first one managed to fire one wild shot. The second had time to see the arrow coming, but not to raise his rifle.

The breloons were quick to understand that the two cats, plus five blue men and an unknown number of bowmen hidden in the trees, were too much for them. In the first flurry, seven of them died or were crippled. Of the rest, mutants' darts wounded a few and each of the cats caught one before it got to the trees. One of those that escaped came flying up Murno's tree, saw him,

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gave him a grimace of hate and leaped to another tree.

The blue men had no trouble getting the two bewildered mutant slaves to land the cars. Murno, slumped in awe at his own cool slaying of two Gaddyl, wondered abstractedly if they could have worked the same hypnosis on the aliens.

They had to call him twice to get him moving. He stood close to the trees, very conscious of the gee-hawks that were milling around the scene of carnage, shrieking their excitement and uncertainty.

The oldest mutant, who now had several other scratches to go along with the one Murno had given him, grinned. "What now, bowman? You know the Gaddyl better than we."

Murino's mind came to life. "Get the arrows out of them, and make it look as if the animals had killed them. Can your cats be persuaded to a litte clawing?"

"Easily." The blue man looked at the two stunned slaves, who were actually weeping over the Gaddyl. "What about these? Kill them here?"

"Must you? They are harmless."

"The Old one wil decide about them, then. Now, as to these two flying cars. Dare we take them?" He seemed to think suddenly of something else, and looked distant for a moment. "No; the Old One does not approve. How to get rid of them? We do not want a swarm prowling over our tracks here."

"I will set them to fly south, slowly. By the time they are found it should have rained here."

"Do it, then. We will drag these monkey carcasses into the trees, where something will dine upon them. Unless they are fit for humans."

"I think not," Murno said, repelled by the thought.

"Can the live ones find their way home?"

"Not from here. They will live or die, as they can. unless someone finds them soon. They will range from here."

"And the birds?"

"They will find their way home in a few days, if they are not gathered up before then. They carry instruments so the Gaddyl know where they are."

"We had best leave this spot, then. I had hoped to take a cow, but let us get back to the hills and gather some turkeys instead."

XI

They lost the hawks without any trouble, and the birds, to Murno's relief, followed the two cars away. The party went back upstream and found the turkeys. They took six from each of two locations.

They had to camp that night, and the next morning the mutant told Murno, apologetically, that they'd have to put him into a walking sleep so he wouldn't know where they were taking him. Before they did so, the mutant said, "We have had sport together, pale one. We hope the Old One's decision will not prevent our hunting together again."

"And I," said Murno, not insincerely.

He thought it was a day and a

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half they travelled before they restored him to knowing clearly what he was doing. It was close to noon, but they said there was no point in eating since they were only a hour from the Old One's camp.

Another party, six young men and one a little more mature, had joined them somewhere, with three more cats. The cats were not entirely cordial among themselves, but no open fights broke out. This other party bore butchered parts of a heifer.

They were traveling up a small canyon which rose with the hills around it. Soon a blue man met them, looked Murno over curiously and took charge of him. The rest of the two parties, except for the one older individual, took the meat and the cats up a small side canyon. Murno and the two others continued on.

The man who'd stopped them was the most adult-looking Murno had seen yet, older than the one from the other hunting party by a good ten years, Murno would have guessed, which would put him somewhere around Murno's age. Both of them had full heads of hair, mustaches and beards. They talked together freely, and to Murno.

The first thing Murno asked, when he got a chance, was, "My family?"

"You'll see them in a few minutes," the eldest mutant said. "We have set you up a camp you will like."

It was a camp in a shallow cave again, in an out-leaning cliff of granite in an angle of the canyon that Murno would have picked himself, assuming he were going to camp on the ground. The stream ran within a few yards, and around the end of the big granite mass was an easy path into the forest. There was enough cover right up to the camp.

All four of them ran to meet him, and the blue men halted while the reunion was properly carried out. Then, noting the embers of a fire, Murno said, "I hope lunch is ready. I'm starved."

Klayr looked concerned, and started to say that they'd already eaten, assuming he would have too, or something like that; but one of the blue men said, "The Old One has delayed the meal for you." He looked as if Murno had committed some breach of etiquette; or a blasphemy. Then he said, "But of course; you did not know . . ."

The family evidently wasn't invited, and watched him go forlornly.

Now they began to pass camps of the blue people, in protected corners of the canyon, and Murno saw females for the first time. They were as he would have expected; daintier than the men but by no means fragile, and very handsome. There were only a few who looked much out of their youth, and these seemed to draw respect from both men and women.

Each camp, which might hold from ten to fifty individuals, had something different about it which, with the different decorations and different hair-dos of the women, gave him the impression they rep-

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resented separate tribes or communities. As they went up the canyon, the proportion of mature individuals increased, though they were nowhere more than a small proportion. The patriarchs of each camp, if you could call vigorous men in young middle age that, joined them, until there was a proud procession.

One who joined up, near the end of the trek, was the spokesman Murno already knew.

Then they came to a blind cliff, over which the stream came in a thirty-foot fall. There were a number of caves hollowed out by ancient waters, and here, apparently, the banquet was taking place. There were already some mature blue men standing about. Murno had little attention for them, for standing in front of a cave near the waterfall was the Old One himself.

There wasn't any mistaking him. He was the only one who showed any signs of real maturity, though he was by no means senile. His hair, which he wore in a long braid down his back almost to the waist, was lightened by age, and so was his beard. His face was seamed with time, etched and shaped by a million past smiles, a million frowns. The old eyes were keen but friendly.

It was a face of remarkable strength, and the body matched it. The Old One might not be able, because of sheer bulk, to keep up with his fleet descendants, but Murno was sure he could pick up one of them in either arm, and toss them like children. He looked and stood as if he could move fast enough, if he had to. And the hugeness of muscle sent shivers up Murno's back.

The others all paid him the deference of complete attention, and a distance of ten yards or so.

He smiled at Murno, and said in a surprising mild voice, "Come sit with me, freed man. The first thing we must do is stop the complaining of your stomach."

That was the most pleasant thing he could have said, because the delicious smells had been working on Murno for the last ten minutes.

Evidently other hunting parties had gotten back earlier. There were whole sides of beef on great spits, over fires Murno would have considered too extravagant by twice. There were strips of pork loin, broiled to crispness, and turkeys stuffed with fragrant herbs and broiled whole. There were fruits and greens, great bowls of thin-shelled walnuts, and tubs of steaming rice. There were roast eggs and whole roast potatos, and a stew of venison and vegetables, rich with the tastes of onions and rare seasonings. There was a flat bread with a rough dark crust, which still steamed when it was broken. There was churned fresh butter. And there was wine.

The Old One smiled at Murno's stare, and said, "Wine I insist on ahead of many things. It has been long since you tasted it." It was a statement, not a question.

"Not since I was a slave; and then only a few furtive sips," Murno said. He felt uncomfortable in

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spite of his host's obvious effort to make him at ease.

They sat across a raised slab of rock from one another. Several women came and went, serving. They were the only ones at the banquet. "My wives," the Old One explained.

The other elders sat at other slabs, close enough to be included in the talk when the Old One wished. It looked as if they'd all been waiting on Murno's arrival. At least his was not the only ravenous appetite.

The Old One was still eating when Murno felt like one of the stuffed turkeys. Finally, the incredible being sat back and let the women clear away the wooden slabs that served as dishes, leaving a fresh skin of wine, some fruit and the walnuts.

He said to Murno, "You had an adventurous trip from the bay."

Murno had the uncomfortable feeling still, and he thought he might as well try to clear up one thing. "You seem to know a great deal," he said. There was more in his mind, but he hesitated.

His host smiled. "We cannot read your mind," he said. "At least we can not invade all your private thoughts. Strong emotions, we can feel. For instance, I felt the death of the lion you killed. I also had a vague vision of the affair; some of us enjoy that power to a limited degree. My father . . ." He stopped, and sipped some wine. "You were surprised to learn we actually existed Were you fleeing blindly, then, without any plan?"

Murno was full of cold fear, and something like loathing. His host might speak casually about outlandish powers, but to Murno they were things that belonged to a vague, unclean sort of spirit world; worse than the world of the Gaddyl, even; a facet of existence to be shunned, even if one believed in it. He sat, unable to answer.

The Old One said, almost sorrowfully, "I suppose you cannot like us. Consider, though: who can choose what he is to be born? You were born a slave. Was that your choosing? Should you be hated for it?"

The truth cut through to Murno's mind. It was very correctly put, he thought; he could probably never learn to like these beings. He understood, in a practical and rudimentary way, why that was his reaction; but it was as much a part of him as the color of his own skin. Blue was not his color.

But, aside from one's feelings, there were such things as logic, and honor, and common sense if he wanted to be down-to-earth about it. He was in the Old One's power. He had eaten their food; and yes, not two days ago, been through an adventure with some of them; actually enjoyed it. He'd liked the young men, felt a comradeship then at least.

He said, "I will try not to dislike you, though you can understand I can't help the way I feel. Mostly I was fleeing blindly, as you say. There are legends about you, which I doubted. There are also legends about free men beyond you, in the high mountains. I thought that if

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they existed I might take the Gaddyl weapon to them, and they might give us sanctuary." After a moment, he added, "I suppose you have the weapon now."

"We have the weapon," the blue man said, "and some other devices we have hidden away during the centuries. We even have more than one of the grav cars; that is why I was not interested in the ones you captured. That was a bit of two-way mind reading, incidentally; between a grandson of mine and me, both concentrating on a specific question. I was afraid you would not know how to disconnect its position indicator." He paused and watched Murno thoughtfully for a moment. "I think I may give you the weapon and send you to the free men, who do exist and with whom we are neither friendly nor unfriendly. But first, will you listen to some explanations about my people?"

Murno had his share of curiosity, and he was more than willing to listen. In fact, he admitted wryly to himself, his curiosity about them was stronger than either his fear or his animosity.

"I have nearly seven centuries to look back upon," his host said, and waited for Murno to recover slightly. "Yes, I am truly the Old One. My father died in a hunt at something over six centuries, so I do not know how long he might have lived. I am only half Blue Mutant; and so are all of us. When the Gaddyl created us they created, or unlocked, more than they knew. When they found out, they decided to destroy us. My father and a few others escaped; so far as we know, only my father survived. He mated with a number of normal women. I am the only surviving son." He paused again, mind far away for a moment. "I feel," he resumed, "as if I might live another century or two. But none of my sons, and none of my nephews, have lived more than six hundred years. Some of them have been old and feeble at five hundred. It is the same with our mental powers. I could hypnotize you here on this spot, without effort, alone. My twelve living sons would have to join into groups of three or four, and work together. The youngsters, some of whom are my descendants of seven and eight generations, have to use their hands, or their voices, to help them focus their own minds. We will not know for another century whether they will develop farther as they grow up; nor how long they will live."

Murno's mind was struggling to take it all in. One thought struck him. "The ones I hunted with," he said, "How old . . .?"

His host smiled. "The youngest, my eighth lineal descendant, is one hundred twenty-seven. The one you nicked so neatly with your knife is two hundred eleven. The head of that family, whom you know, is two hundred eighty-three."

Murno sat stunned. He'd been thinking of men three times his age, and more, as barely grown up.

"You've noticed, I'm sure," the Old One went on, "the vow of si-

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lence among them. If they relied on speech, their mental powers would hardly develop at all. You see, Murno, we are not as happy a lot as you might think. The boys and girls do not worry about it much, but I am the leader of over eleven thousand people now — if you will let me call us people — and I do not know how my race is going to work out. The Gaddyl created my father from normals, over one thousand years ago. In another thousand years we may drift back to your own nature; may live less than a hundred years and have none of the tricks you find so distasteful. Or we may reach a stability in between, somewhere. I do not think I will live to know. Especially now that the truce with the Gaddyl is ended." He sat up straighter and looked hard at Murno.

"That brings us to you and your family," he said. "We are not usually so tolerant of strangers. I think you will admit we have not treated you badly; I hope to continue that way. In return I want a favor. Will you consider it, and agree now if you can?"

Murno tried to keep his wits working. "You spoke of sending me on to the free men," he said. "Do you mean I must do you some favor before I can go?"

"No. When you reach them."

"I will be out of your power then?"

"I do not want to compel you. I want you to be willing, and I want your word on it. We spy even on the bay sometimes, and I know a little about you. You have risked your life to help slaves escape. You are the best bowman we have ever seen; better than you need be as a hunter. Only a certain kind of character — a pride — can make a man work hard enough to be so good at anything. I can rely on your word. You would be too proud to break it."

Murno's face grew warm. "What is the favor that you want me to do, then?"

"I want you to be a go-between. I want an alliance with the free men, now that we must both fight the Gaddyl. The free men have disliked us, partly because we did not fight the Gaddyl. They did not understand that I had to wait to see how my race was going to turn out. I have feared that certain courses would cause us to rely too much on things other than our own gifts, and that we would lose the gifts. I have not let anyone but a few of my sons, already old, study the Gaddyl devices, or any other kind of science." He watched Murno for a second. "Now I must change my plans. I want you to convince the free men that we are sincere. You may offer them the Gaddyl things we have, as soon as you are sure the free men will work with us. Together, we can do much more."

Murno, still a little blurry in his head, pondered it. He was suspicious . . . but attracted.

The Old One said, "The important thing is that we all have the Gaddyl to fight."

That convinced Murno. "I will do it," he said.

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XII

In two days, the escort took them to a vast valley between cliffs of solid rock. The floor held pleasant meadows, groves of pine, and a string of lakes. Though the crisp thin air told Murno the floor itself was high, the walls towered so fantastically Murno wondered if even clouds could pass above them. Yet that was not the highest land in sight. From the narrowed western entrance, he could look east up the valley and see, beyond the pine-covered mountains, mighty masses of pure white. It could only be snow, just as the legends said.

They camped in the lower end of the valley, then started up it the next morning. He noticed that the blue men kept to cover, as if grav cars might come here.

In the early afternoon, in a grove of trees on a gentle slope, they stopped. The leader said, "Wait here," and all the mutants vanished up the slope.

Half an hour later, from somewhere down the valley, a mutant voice sang several notes. Now Murno guessed that they were leaving. He did not like simply sitting there, but he'd been told to wait.

Then he heard a voice behind him. "Just sit still, mister."

The accent was odd, and different from that of the blue men. Another voice, from a different angle, said, "A bow and a knife, in sight. Hand-made clothes."

"All right," said the first voice, "Who are you, mister? Were you with the Bluies?"

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Murno had had his fill of interrogations lately. He said, "Can I turn around? I won't bite you."

"Make it real slow."

He turned slowly and saw one of them. The man stood beside a tree-trunk, twenty-five yards up the slope. He had a weapon pointed at Murno; a long metal tube like the barrel of a rifle, with a bulky attachment at the rear end. The man said. "Air gun. Hold still."

By now Murno had spotted two more of the guns pointed at him, and he supposed there might be others. He looked at the man. He was a normal, apparently. He wore a garment that covered him, head and all, of some cloth that looked too fine to be hand-woven. It was mostly green, but with spots and dashes of brown and gray. Bits of pine foliage were stuck into little loops on the head and houlders. He wore heavy-soled leather boots, as the Gaddyl did when out hunting.

He said, "Well?"

Murno said, "The blue men brought me to you. My name is Murno, and I've been running from the Gaddyl. I've got one of their handguns under my jacket. I thought you might be interested. If you're not, I'd just as soon be on my way. I've put my family through a lot to get here."

Another voice, whose owner Murno couldn't see, put in, "He may have a tell-tale on him. If he's got a handgun, that may have one too. Or it may explode and blow us all to hell."

"I know," said the man in sight. To Murno. he said. "Get it out and toss it down there. Watch where you point it."

Murno, acting more patient than he felt, did so. The man stared at it hungrily, then jerked his eyes back to Murno. "Maybe you're some kind of a spy. For the Gaddyl, or for the Bluies." He called to someone else, "You pick up anything?"

"Not on the usual wavelengths," a voice said.

The man said to Murno, "The Bluies don't let people through."

"They let us through," Murno said testily. "Things are changed now. The Gaddyl are hunting them."

The man's eyes widened a little, and he seemed to ponder. Then he grinned.

"Yeah? That could make sense. But we're not going to take your word for it until we check a little. What's your name?"

"Murno."

The man called out, "Breg."

"Yes?"

"Get that gun. Watch how you handle it. Take it and hide it; you know where. Then go back and get somebody with instruments to see if anything's bugged. And bring some clothes for these people . . . Now, you. We'll have to camp out somewhere for a couple of days. Will that be too much of a hardship?"

Murno couldn't help grinning at that. Carefully he unfastened the top of his jacket. It was surprisingly warm here, considering how close they were to the snow. He said, "If you people don't know how to camp out, we'll show you. We'll show you a lot of things!" END

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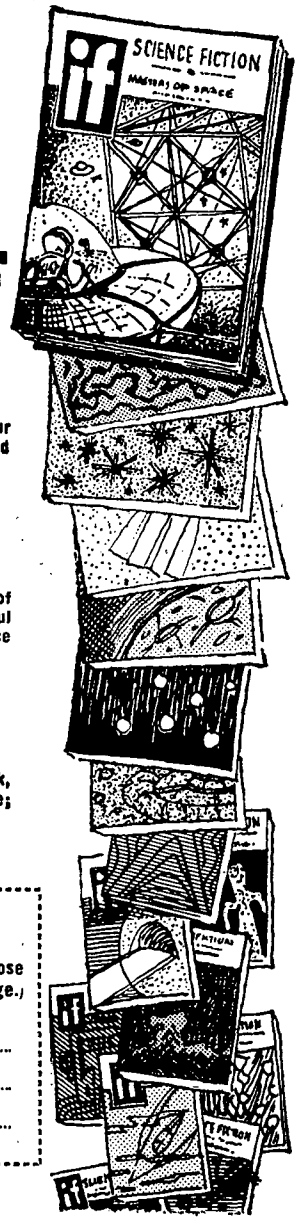

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To select people with writing talent worth developing, the 12 Famous Writers have designed a revealing Talent Test. The coupon will bring you a copy, along with a brochure about the School. Your completed Test will be graded without charge or obligation by one of the School's instructors. If your Test indicates writing talent, you are then eligible to enroll in the School. You are, however, under absolutely no obligation to do so.

Famous Writers School
Dept. 6392, Westport, Connecticut

I am interested in finding out whether I have writing talent worth developing. Please mail me, without obligation, the Famous Writers Talent Test.

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Mrs. ..... Age .....
Miss
Street .....

City ..... Zone .....

County ..... State .....

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